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In Praise of Mary



Edited by
Raymond J. Treece

Bellarmino Theological Lectures
Volume One

A Grail Publication

St. Meinrad

Indiana

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Feast of the Purification B.M.V.
February 2, 1955

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 55 - 9040

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GRAIL PUBLICATIONS
St. Meinrad, Indiana

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PREFACE

MODERN educators no longer limit the area of a college's service to the small segment of the community which forms its regular academic student body. They insist that it widen its vision and broaden its services to embrace all who seek advanced education. This thinking is in accord with the concept "Catholic," i.e. universal, and should be an integral part of the program of a Catholic college.

Moreover, a Catholic college cannot be merely an institution which offers instruction to youth in the secular arts and sciences. Were this its only purpose, it would deserve to be characterized as just a competitor of the secular institutions of higher learning, state supported or privately operated. It indeed would have a weak and tenuous reason for existence, especially if it could be shown that its services could be supplied as effectively and as economically elsewhere.

If, then, a Catholic college is not to be judged as just another competitive educational facility, and perhaps a replaceable one, it must have a distinctive purpose. It must deserve to wear the name Catholic as a pledge of a special educational function. This right is justified when a college effectively signifies its purpose is to offer instruction in the sacred sciences based upon Divine Revelation. A proper program of religious instruction and study is the heart of the curriculum and the prime reason for the continuance of a Catholic college.

These purposes were adopted in the founding of the young Bellarmine college in 1950. To further their fulfillment, an

annual program of public lectures of Catholic theology was inaugurated in the spring of 1954. They are to be known as the Bellarmine Theological Lectures.

His Holiness Pius XII proclaimed 1954 as a Marian Year. The theology department of the faculty considered it a high privilege and a fitting token of fidelity to Holy Mother the Church to follow the Supreme Pontiff's admonition:

"But to facilitate matters and make the project more successful, We desire that in each diocese there be held for this purpose appropriate sermons and discourses, by means of which this tenet of Christian doctrine may be more clearly explained; so that the Faith of the people may be increased and their devotion to the Virgin Mother of God become daily more inflamed, and that henceforth all may take upon themselves to follow in the footsteps of our heavenly mother, willingly and with promptitude."—*Fulgens Corona*

Thus, mariology was chosen as the topic of the inaugural lecture series. The decision was seconded by the grateful consideration that Bellarmine is an American Catholic college able to function with all the blessings of those personal and group liberties embodied in the political constitution of this nation dedicated to Mary's Immaculate Conception.

These lectures, *In Praise of Mary*, pretend to be neither a textbook nor an exhaustive treatise on formal mariology. The intent of the distinguished scholars who prepared these papers was to discuss pertinent high lights in Our Lady's many-jeweled crown of glory and to present the fruit of their study and meditation in a popular and dignified fashion for the faithful in general.

The editor of this volume, who was also chairman of the lecture series, has prepared outlines and questions on each subject for the use of study clubs and discussion groups.

Reverend Raymond J. Treece

1 GOD SPEAKS OF MARY



BY

RT. REV. MSGR. W. L. NEWTON, S.S.D.

THERE are many evident reasons why this series of lectures on our Blessed Mother should be most congenial. Basic to them all is the instinctive love we have for the Woman who brought us our Saviour, and the need we feel for her continued help if we are to profit by His grace. These sentiments are real, and even when rationalized are found to be integral to our Christian faith and experience. What is more, we are given an opportunity, in the atmosphere of a papal dedication of this year to her, to examine intelligently the roots and causes of our devotion; and in the process to deepen the devotion as we clarify and emphasize the causes. We are dealing, let us remember, with the greatest story ever told; and in that story with the heroine without whom, in God's good pleasure, the story never could have been told.

It is, further, quite proper to initiate our discussion of this pleasant subject with a study of the clear, strong and invariable portrait of Mary given us by God Himself through the two great channels by means of which He speaks to us, the

Scriptures and Tradition. In fact, we acknowledge it to be certain that if God had not informed us about her we should never of ourselves have learned what we now accept as ordinary fact. For, when thoroughly contemplated, especially in contrast with the human nature we behold in ourselves and in those about us, her character and her intimate place in the mystery of the Redemption are so exalted as to belong among the secrets of God, to be counted among those thoughts which not even the human imagination dare construct. This might in a way explain the hesitation which those outside the range of Divine revelation show towards our Marian doctrines and the difficulties they raise against the respect we pay to her. There is nothing human in what we believe of her. On the contrary, neither in Jewish thinking before Christ, nor in the faith of the early centuries of Christianity would such doctrine be tolerated unless clearly contained in the message directly attributable to God.

The strict necessity of a Divine origin for the truths involved in our understanding of Mary and of her function in the Divine plan of the Redemption will help us from the start to appreciate what we mean by Revelation. Take this illustration. Man, we know, is fundamentally religious; he must at times be fully conscious of his need of God, and be moved by a sense of reverence towards Him. Yet, when left to his own further development of the idea of God, working out from a darkened mind and often enough prompted by merely selfish motives, he can arrive at some rather grotesque concepts. We need only recall the absurdities of ancient mythology to bring this home. Hence, if God wished to be known and honored properly He had to correct these false notions. This He did by manifesting to us His true nature, and, in His goodness, by acquainting us with some aspects of that nature which we never

could have learned without His help. This same tendency to take a human view of what is Divine was not eliminated even with the appearance of God among us in the Person of Christ. Those who were, and who are wise in their own earthly conceits screened His teachings through the sieve of a pagan or secular philosophy; and the result is some extremely odd doctrines. We witness this going on round about us today as much as in any other age.

This intervention of God to purify our religious thinking, to help us know correctly what can be known of Him by the human intellect, and further, to open up to us a whole realm of knowledge concerning Him that we could not have discovered of ourselves, is what we term Revelation. Yet there is something more to be remembered. It was not enough for God to have communicated with us; He had also to guarantee and preserve the integrity of what He revealed. This He did by setting it down in part in a book which He Himself wrote, and by placing it under the protection of a living tradition to which He granted the attribute of infallibility. The first we call the Bible; the second is the Church.

It is upon this revelation that we rest this evening. And the subject we are to discuss lies within the framework of the greatest truth God has manifested to us, the mystery of His love in redeeming fallen man, in raising him again to a participation in His own Divine nature. More particularly, we are engaged with an almost incredible detail of that Redemption, with the woman to whom He in His infinite condescension granted so intimate a share in it. Our immediate purpose, therefore, is to inquire carefully into what God has told us about our Mother Mary.

The pursuit of this thesis leads us into a kind of drama in three acts. 1. In the Old Testament, by way of involution, we

are introduced to a woman who will have an important role in the advent of the Messiah. 2. In the New Testament we attain to the climax in the identification of this woman as Mary, and in the portrayal of her romantic place in the story. 3. The denouement leads us down the avenues of tradition, where we behold her carried in triumph, more and more explicitly enthroned in the lives and devotion of those who have been elected beneficiaries of her mission.

I

The setting and the action for the first part of the drama is the gradual unfolding in the Old Testament of God's plan for the spiritual rehabilitation of mankind. That this plan had to be revealed by God is rather obvious: it was too noble and too generous for man to conceive. That it had to be gradual should be equally patent. Its tremendously exalted details, such as the Incarnation, the vicarious death of the God-man, the very nature of man's reunion with God, would have been at first so amazing as to be unintelligible if not actually shocking. Hence God prepared men for His mercy by progressively manifesting His designs, so that their accomplishment might be both recognized and accepted.

The need of such preparation was all the greater in respect to the woman whom God was admitting to an essential part in His plan. The concept "Mother of God" could at no time be reconciled with the religious culture of Israel; and the efforts of the prophets to preserve their Monotheism undefiled would not help the matter. Hence in the Old Testament we need not look for more than an insinuation of the role Mary was to play in the Divine plan. Yet that insinuation was given by God, and in such a way as to condition Israel for the glorious truths unfolded in later revelations. Let us glance with admiration at the manner in which wisdom accomplished this.

The first adumbration of Mary's participation in God's redemptive work will be discovered in the progressive evolution of Old Testament Messianism. The coming of the Messiah, the Redeemer, is the thesis of the entire Old Testament. It moves forward steadily through four covenants between God and man, each a divine effort to bring man closer to God, and each more explicit in its promise of an individual, a personal Saviour. Within the framework of the last of these covenants, that made at Mt. Sinai, there were four institutions fulfilling the required mediation between God and Israel, and these served in a particular way to direct the mind towards this Saviour. The priests, the prophets, the kings, the wise men—all were recognized as agents of God; and yet all were evidently imperfect and incomplete. This in itself induced the pious to look for the coming of One who would gather all this mediation in Himself, and accomplish it effectively. This hope was further encouraged by the specific prophecies defining the character and office of the Messiah. Moses foretold His function as prophet; David referred to Him as the eternal priest; Nathan promised He would occupy forever the throne of David; the Wisdom Books describe Him as Wisdom personified.

The purpose, therefore, of this divine romance is to raise the minds of men to contemplate the Saviour for whom God was preparing the way; and to promote in the hearts of men a yearning for His advent. But still more, all this prophecy indicated an intimate relationship of the Saviour to God; yes, that God Himself would bring about the Redemption. And it could readily have been suspected, from more than a few allusions, that the Messiah would be divine.

Within the atmosphere of this messianic hope there is one element of special meaning to our subject. It is the place

allotted by God to women in many of the essential phases of the story. This is brought into relief in the very beginning by the instrumentality of Eve in the moral catastrophe which is at the root of the story.¹ We need only mention the significance of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel in the narrative of the Patriarchs from whom was generated the Chosen People. Recall the place of his mother in the birth and infancy of Moses; Anna in the begetting of Samuel; Thamar, Ruth and Bethsabee in the genealogy of Christ. Often in the list of the kings of Juda special mention is made of their mothers. Concerning all of these it must be noted that the only reason for introducing them is to indicate the part each played in the unfolding and the ultimate accomplishment of God's design, and in the arrival of the Messias. Each became the mother of an important agent in the divine plan; in each instance there is evidence of a supernatural direction of events; each is, therefore, herself an agent of God.

In passing it might be of interest to remark that while Thamar, Ruth and Bethsabee are among the chief of the *dramatis personae*, holding place among the immediate forebears of the Messias, there is in each some note of imperfection. This is consonant with the whole context of the Old Testament, in which we seldom find an actor who is without blemish. It is also true of the messianic context; and the facts would only incline Israel to expect that the mother of the Messias, as the Messias Himself, would be free from the weaknesses of fallen mankind, that she would be above the defects evident in other women.

It is, then, in this setting which recognized woman as enjoying a prominent participation in the economy that was drawing the Messias ever nearer that we can examine the two references to a particular woman who will have immediate

association with the hope of redemption.

The first (Gen. 3,15) will be found in connection with the primal revelations, and will share the necessary obscurity of its context. Yet its significance is considerable since it is the premise upon which may rest the good hope of later ages, though actual reference to it is not made in the Old Testament.² In condemning Satan for his bringing ruin on our first parents, God says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; He shall crush your head, and you shall lie in wait for his heel."

The statement is, therefore, a punitive sentence, descriptive of the warfare between the human race and the powers of darkness which was to echo down through future ages. But there was a word of hope reflected in the assurance of an ultimate and complete triumph for mankind over Satan. But the view is not confined to them; it rather turns down the corridors of time and ends in a conquest. Satan is the victim. Who is the Victor? While the fruits of the victory will be shared in by all mankind, the insinuation here, in conformity with all later messianism in the Old Testament, is that the conqueror will be an individual, one who will, in a sense, "recapitulate" in himself the human race. He must be born of the children of Eve, and hence of a woman who will show some contrast with Eve, and contribute to the triumph as Eve did to the degradation of the children of men.

Remote, therefore, and proportionately obscure, this first revelation of good news for fallen mankind implies, and in itself does no more than imply, the intervention of a woman, the mother of the conqueror. She is present in the literal sense, though from this first promise her identification cannot be inferred.

Before we come upon the other reference to this woman

(Isa. 7,14) millenia will have passed by, the Victor will have drawn much nearer. He is known as prophet and priest; of the children of Abraham He will bring blessing to all the tribes of the earth; He will be the king in whom will be perpetuated the glorious reign of His father David. In every detail it is supposed He will be born of a woman, a woman who will reflect the honor of her son, and whose instrumentality in giving Him birth admits her to a share in His work.

Isaias, towards the end of the eighth century B.C., was sent by God to Ahaz, who was being hard pressed in his war with Ephraim and Syria. The substance of the message he was charged with was an encouragement to the king to place his trust in God. When the king hesitated, the prophet said, "The Lord himself will give you a sign. A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and call his name Emmanuel." Soon after this (Isa. 8,1ff) the prophet's wife presents him with a son to whom is given a symbolic name pertinent to the immediate circumstances: the promised deliverance was to come before this latter child would be able to stammer out the name of father or mother. But two elements in the prophecy show that it reaches far beyond the time of its delivery. The mother is called a virgin; the son is called "God with us."³

The term "Virgin" has been the subject of some debate. The word used in the original (*almah*) in itself, and from usage, bears the meaning of a young, marriageable woman. It is never used of a woman already married, except in the difficult verse, Prov. 30,19. The Greek translation of Isaias, made for the Jews in Egypt something over a century before Christ, seems to understand it in the true sense of a virgin. While, therefore, the strict virginity of this woman cannot be proved from the term, it is obvious that she is not the wife of the prophet. Neither can her child Emmanuel be the son of the

prophet. Rather, both terms carry the reader at once into the clearly messianic oracles of the following chapters, which are among the most beautiful and distinct of the entire Old Testament, and in which the divinity of the Messiah is more than insinuated.

With this verse a climax is reached in the Old Testament revelations regarding the Messiah and His Mother. Much more will be said of Him by the later prophets; but nothing more significant. The mind of the pious Jew would then be raised with still greater hope and yearning to the advent of the Redeemer; but he would also be the more aware of the place of this woman in His coming, and of the unusual dignity and prerogatives she would enjoy. God had told him this of her.

II

When we come to enquire what God has told us of Mary in the New Testament, obscurity gives way to a brilliant clarity that is blinding. We come to learn that in her case, as in that of her Divine Son, realization goes far beyond prophecy. Not only is the woman identified as Mary, but the amazing import of her participation in the victory of Christ is made manifest. This must be had always in view: the thesis of the New Testament is the Redemption accomplished; and whatever is said of Mary is said in that context. Christ, the Son of God, came into the world and redeemed us; but He both came and achieved His mission as the Son of Mary. What God reveals to us concerning her in the New Testament we may consider under three headings: 1. Her place in the story of Christ's birth and early life; 2. her relations with Him during the Public Ministry; 3. the closing scenes of the New Testament.

1. Christ's Birth and Early Life

Both Matthew and Luke indicate the right she has to be

included in the Gospel by devoting each two chapters to the subject of the Nativity. Matthew wrote for the Jews with all their rich heritage of messianic prophecy; Luke for the Gentiles, to confirm their faith and complete their knowledge. Yet the substance of their message is the same: the miraculous nature of our Lord's birth of a virgin; His identification as the Messiah and the Son of God; His manifestation to Israel and to the Gentile world. Mary's intimate connection with all this is unmistakable; it is at the same time lighted up with an inspired illumination.

Our attention is first called to her identification. Her name is Mary, her residence is Nazareth, her lineage is undoubtedly that of David. If our analysis of the revelations of the Old Testament is correct, then the woman alluded to in Genesis and defined in Isaias is here openly presented to us. The fact that God sent an angel to her conveys two thoughts: first, it is not only a sign of the respect He has for her, but classes her with the agents in His plan whom God similarly honored in the Old Testament; and further, it emphasizes the significance of the mission He is assigning to her.

In addressing her the angel makes use of extraordinary terms: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." Her fullness of grace tells of the extraordinary measure in which she enjoys the divine favor; and what that favor is we learn from Paul's use of the term (Eph. 1,6), the grace with which God favors us in His Son, the sharing in the Divine Nature through Christ. The presence of God with her is a confirmation of this. Here is the root of the doctrine that from the first moment of her conception Mary was free from the taint of original sin, and possessed in its fulness the presence of God in her soul.

Another favor with which God adorned her is her virginity,

clearly supposed by Matthew but plainly stated by Luke, who twice calls her a virgin before telling of her virginal conception. In Matthew reference is made to the prophecy of Isaias (7,14), and this removes the uncertainty attached there to the term "virgin." This follows not so much from Matthew's citation of the prophecy, but from the other indications of her virginity. The fact of her virginity is brought out with some deliberateness in the answer Mary gave the angel: "How shall this happen, since I do not know man" (Lk. 1,34).⁴ Some have questioned whether this proves that she had made a vow of virginity in the technical sense of a vow; but there is no doubt that it adds to the fact of her virginity at least the firm intention of her remaining a virgin. Here is the basis of our conviction of her perpetual virginity.

The central theme in the whole narrative is the miraculous conception of her Son, through the direct intervention of God and the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit. And this takes its full meaning from the identification of that Son: the king promised the house of David, the Messiah, the Son of the Most High, whose very name Jesus tells that He is the expected Saviour. In assessing the value of these terms we should attend first of all to their meaning for Mary, who must certainly have understood them as defining the divinity of her Son. For Matthew and Luke they must have had the same meaning, for when they wrote they had full knowledge of our Lord's true nature. This is the crowning revelation: Mary is the Mother of Jesus, of Jesus who is really God. No greater office could be granted by God to a human being; and there is hardly limit to the dignity and the spiritual prerogatives that follow upon it.

And yet there is more to be discovered in the Gospel of the Infancy, especially in Luke's manner of narrating it. The

message of the angel was not coercive; the acceptance of this exalted office was left dependent upon Mary's will. She hesitated because of her resolution to lead a virginal life; and all creation, yes, God Himself waited upon her consent. Her free declaration, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word," made the Incarnation possible, and gave her a causal participation in the Redemption. It is in part this that justifies her title of Co-redemptrix. By her assent she conferred an honorable distinction upon the whole human race, by uniting it with the Divine Nature; and by it she gave spiritual birth to all who through the Author of Grace have been called to participate in that Divine Nature.

2. The Public Ministry

After this burst of Divine revelation, which in so short a space tells us so much that we could in no other way learn about Mary, the Gospels maintain a relative silence in her regard. The episode of the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple is an illustration of her life during the years that intervened before the start of the Public Ministry. The story is rich in meaning; but for the rest we are left to reconstruct from what we know of the customs of the time the manner of her life. Yet we can readily imagine her intense maternal interest in her Son, and the filial devotion of that Son to her. During the eventful period of the Public Ministry of Christ we come upon only three references to her.⁵ It need not follow from this that the meetings of Mother and Son were so few during these years. Our Lord was often either in Nazareth or its neighborhood, and we can be certain He did not neglect calling on His Mother. Still the fact remains that the mention of her is confined to these three instances.

Further, in all three texts there is an apparent separation between Christ and His Mother that merits attention.

The mere absence of more frequent mention of her is easily explained. The thesis of the Gospels is Christ and His message of salvation, and it does not allow for what might be construed as a mere human relationship. That there is no intention to diminish her importance is obvious from what Matthew and Luke have already told concerning the birth of Christ. A brief analysis will show that in none of the three texts is there any disparagement of her.

At the marriage feast of Cana (John 2,4) our Lord answered Mary's solicitous remark about the failure of the wine with the words, "What to me and to thee." The expression occurs often enough in both the Old and the New Testament; and in some cases it has the rather strong sense of "Let me alone," or "Do not bother me." Such a meaning for the words in this instance is certainly excluded by the context, since there was nothing in the situation that might warrant it. In view of what took place immediately, this meaning hardly can be justified by the text. All admit that the statement is an interrogation, and that its significance depends upon the context. Here it can have, and probably does have the milder sense of, "What do you wish me to do," implying, "Leave the matter to me." Above this question, however, the scene is most illustrative of her attitude towards her Son. There was no hesitation in her mind; she knew that He would take care of the problem.

On a later occasion (Mark 3,32), when our Lord was told that His Mother and brethren were enquiring for Him, He declared His Mother and brethren to be those who do the will of God. A similar instance occurred some time after this (Luke 11,27f), when a woman blessed the womb that bore Him and the breasts that nourished Him. He answered

that they are rather blessed who hear the word of God and keep it. In either event His meaning is clear: the spiritual relationship He had come to establish between God and man arises immeasurably above blood kinship, even above the intimacy of a son with his mother. John has this principle in view when he says of our spiritual birth (1,13) that we are born, "Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

We need not delay over the problem sometimes raised in connection with the references to Christ's brethren. First of all, there is neither mention nor insinuation anywhere in the Scriptures that Mary had other children. There are several allusions to His cousins, as in the case of John the Baptist. The expression can, as is well known, be used of almost any blood relationship, and even in some cases where there is no blood connection. The advertence to Christ's brethren in Acts 1, 14 is to the point, since the next verse tells us there were some one hundred twenty included.

3. End of Public Life

Towards the end of the action in the New Testament story Mary comes again into prominence in two brief references which, in importance, far exceed their brevity.

It is St. John who tells us (19,25-27) of the scene at the foot of the cross in which we find Mary and two or three other women and John himself. It advises us first of all that Mary was in Jerusalem for the feast, and that she must have been witness to all the events preliminary to this scene. Here on Golgotha those events have reached their climax both for Christ and for His Mother; the Son is dying, where else should we expect to find the Mother! But though dying, that Son revealed His concern for and devotion to His Mother by entrusting her to John's care. The beloved disciple had her

thereafter in his home. And Christ also recommended John to the care of Mary. This latter trust has quite generally been taken as at least a symbol of the conferring on Mary her spiritual motherhood over all Christians. This beautiful doctrine, however, goes back rather to her Divine Maternity, in which she begot us also for God in Christ. John elsewhere⁶ seems to evidence his consciousness of this office of Mary. It is not, however, excluded from this scene, for she shared so fully in the sufferings of her Divine Son who was at that moment earning for us our divine sonship that her spiritual Maternity was in reality then consummated.

Yet more is revealed to us here concerning our spiritual Mother. What could more effectively illustrate the mutual love and limitless devotion of this Son and Mother? The scene is the best answer to any suspicion that during the Public Ministry there was any disparagement of her. It further indicates the tenderness of this association even during the hidden years at Nazareth. Yes, it may give substance to the thought that Christ was looking upon her not merely as His Mother in the flesh, but as one whose life was tied in with His own mission, and therefore as associated with Him in the work of the Redemption.

Inferences of equal moment may be drawn from another scene. After the Ascension of our Lord the Apostles returned to the upper room in Jerusalem, and Luke tells us in Acts 1, 14 that "All these with one mind continued steadfastly in prayer with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." This was an assembly of the infant Church, at the beginning of those days of prayer which were to end in the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Brief as it is, this notice is most eloquent of the relations between Mary and the nascent Church. We are impressed at once with the

separate mention of her, as one set apart from other women. And the title she even then enjoyed, "the mother of Jesus," provides the basis of this distinction. What dignity that title held for those who had just witnessed the death, the resurrection and the ascension of that Jesus! Here is the foundation for all her other titles.

This, it would seem, is the final allusion to Mary in the Scriptures. Some have argued that John has her in mind when he speaks in his revelations (Apoc. 12, 1) of the sign that appeared in heaven: "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon was under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars."⁷ But, however attractive this interpretation, and however expected of one like John, it does not appear to have sufficient support either in the context or in tradition. Hence, with the scene on Golgotha and that in the upper room before Pentecost, the Scriptures hand Mary over to the Church, to that living and infallible tradition which was to carry her in honor down through the ages. It was a sacred trust. Her exalted dignity as the Mother of God, recognized in the greeting of the angel and of Elizabeth, her spiritual motherhood of mankind, her tremendous virtues, the devotion of her Son and of all who were close to her—all told expressly the value of this trust which laid heavily upon the Church the responsibility of cherishing her and of preserving in all their brilliance these and the other jewels that studded her glorious crown.

III

It is with this sacred trust that the authoritative traditions of the Church, themselves a source of divine revelation, take up the subject of Mary. It could not, like the talent, be hid away in a napkin; rather it constituted a notable element in the teaching mission of the Church. The confidence we have

in this source of revelation arises out of our knowledge that the Holy Spirit is its immediate director according to the promise made by Christ at the last supper, and as we know from the aftermath of Pentecost. Hence two thoughts must accompany our study of the place of Mary in this tradition. First, that what the whole Church accepted and believed as true of her has the quality of infallibility, assured by this indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Second, we must expect some development of doctrine in her respect, as in other matters of faith; a progress from larger truths to the details of which they are composed, or from the implicit to the explicit.

As further ground for this confidence, let us look briefly at the circumstances of the generations that followed after Pentecost. John had taken Mary into his home where he lived with him, and in frequent association with the first Christians for many years, some say even till the year 60 A.D. In what respect she must have been held in the community we have learned from the reference to her in Acts. She would be known not only to Luke but to all as the Mother of Jesus. Her interest in the Apostles and their teaching can hardly be in doubt. When they set forth on their missionary journeys it was to carry to the world faith in her Son. They carried with them also the doctrine of her participation in the life and labors of that Son. John himself lived till the end of the first century, and he particularly must have spoken often of her, telling of events such as the marriage at Cana and the episode on Golgotha. In fact, what we have learned of her from the Scriptures must be identical with the earliest traditions, since through oral teaching the Church had already spread far before the Gospels were written. Hence the inception of Marian teaching rests upon ground that is both solid and rich.

In the earliest written witnesses to this tradition, that is in the Apostolic fathers, we need not look for either frequent or lengthy treatment of this doctrine. This is understandable first of all from the circumstances just described: Mary had lived among them until recently, and living memory still enshrined her. Then too, the message of Christ was of primary concern, and there was difficulty enough in convincing a pagan world to accept it. In other words, the principle that operated in Christ's public ministry, that neglected His blood relationship with Mary, would be all the more necessary when the missionaries tried to prove to the Gentiles that Christ is truly God.

Yet at a relatively early date in the life of the Church, occasion arose that did, in God's providence, focus more attention upon her. Those who not only refused to accept Christ but added vile attacks on Him, and those who accepted Him but in their own erroneous way of thinking, involved her in their errors and their offensive revilings. Defense of Christ brought with it a vigorous defense of Mary. And perhaps this very need of turning attention to her provoked further discussion of her prerogatives and her virtues. The Fathers and the Ecclesiastical writers who reflect for us the faith of those centuries have brought to us the record of that faith. We shall confine our attention to those traditions which led up to the great Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.), after which a new era in the story of Mary begins.

It is quite natural that the most noticeable element in this earliest tradition concerning Mary should be the constant reference to her as the Mother of Christ. The consideration of Christ as the Son of Mary, and her title "Mother of Jesus"⁸ merely continued the Gospel teaching, and they were pregnant with all the doctrine that later more philosophical treatises

brought out. The heresies denying either the humanity or the divinity of Christ not only occasioned the mention of her but also the further discussion of her spiritual favors.⁹ Since the basis of all Christian teaching was the divinity of Christ, Mary's distinction as the Mother of God was the first and the most eloquently dealt with. Theodoret¹⁰ relates this title with the apostolic tradition. We are not, therefore, surprised that the first formal definition of a Marian doctrine should be that of her Divine Maternity at the Council of Ephesus.

Very early also the Fathers, in search of a means of illustrating the consequences of this exalted title, drew a contrast between Mary and Eve, a contrast that served to make more explicit what had already been taken for granted. Her freedom from all taint of sin, even from the first moment of her conception, was among the first inferences that would flow from the address of Gabriel and from the doctrine of the Divine Maternity. Her perpetual virginity is equally prominent, and is also held to be an apostolic tradition. Never in Christian tradition, even the earliest, any more than in the Gospels, is there any recognition that she might have had other children. On the contrary, her continued virginity, before, during and after the birth of her divine Son, is valiantly defended against the Ebionites, Cerinthus and others.¹¹ There was also drawn from the premise of her Divine Maternity the acknowledgment of her instrumental causality in the salvation of mankind.

It is very interesting to observe how the Fathers, in seeking to prove or illustrate these doctrines, have recourse to the Scriptures, particularly to the Old Testament. In the process they sometimes uncover the fuller literal sense of the passages, as is the case in their treatment of Gen. 3,15 and Isaias 7,14. They see her prefigured in many other passages

where the sense is undoubtedly merely an accommodation. They find adumbrations of her in many symbols, such as the Ark of Noe, Jacob's Ladder, the Closed Gate of the Temple, and so forth. Further, they recognize what in some instances may be real types of her in Sarah, Deborah, Jahel, Judith, and others.¹² Much of this reliance on the Scriptures is not too authoritative; nor need it be urged, since the doctrines involved are seldom based on it.

It was inevitable that with these doctrines there should be associated a profound and tender devotion to Mary. This was inherited, as we have observed from the New Testament and from the first Christians; but as the fuller meaning of her privileges was unfolded, this devotion could not help but grow. There are numerous indications of how universal and earnest this devotion was during these early centuries. Indirectly the Apocrypha, a literature in imitation of the books of the New Testament, bear witness to it.¹³ Some of this literature is heretical, and little of it can be taken too seriously; and yet so much of it deals with the Blessed Virgin that it reveals a general desire to know more about her; and this in turn must be based on a universal interest. Some details from the Apocrypha were so readily accepted that they found their way into orthodox tradition, such as the feast of the Presentation. There exist in the catacombs at Rome two early pictures of Mary. That in the cemetery of Priscilla dates from the second century and shows Mary holding the Infant Jesus on her knees.¹⁴ The other is similar and dates from the third century. There is a rather curious evidence of this devotion in the rebuke that Epiphanius administered to the Collyridiani in the fourth century for their having offered sacrifice to Mary.¹⁵

The words of Epiphanius (d. 403), which reflect an early

belief in Mary's Assumption, in claiming that her body remained incorrupt, may be quoted as an illustration of this devotion. He says with some ardor, "Who would be so mad as to give vent to any such blasphemous and unworthy thought (that her body decomposed)? Who is there that would prefer, instead of singing hymns to her and glorifying her, to entertain thoughts insulting and injurious to the Holy Virgin and not rather to honor that vessel of all the most honored."¹⁶

The first vision of Mary reported in Christian tradition was had by Gregory Thaumaturgus. In it he beheld Mary and John, Mary encouraging John to give further instruction to him.¹⁷ At the beginning of the fourth century Pierius, whose orthodoxy was not above suspicion, preached a sermon on Mary that is evidence both of this devotion to her and of the progress towards a more discursive treatment to the doctrines that centered round her.

The Council of Ephesus was a turning point in this tradition: with the formal definition of Mary's Divine Maternity, treatises dealing with her attributes were encouraged, and feasts commemorating her mysteries became multiplied. In the one direction we have the first steps towards Mariology; in the other the formation of the Marian cycle in the liturgy. Now in the solemnity of this present year dedicated to her, we are reaping the rich harvest of this divinely guided development. In the full light of this revelation, we contemplate our Immaculate Mother enthroned beside her Divine Son above all the saints and angels. This is the glorious inheritance the Church has brought to us. And the special aspect of the trust given to us is, in recognition of her mediating all graces, to carry on to still greater realization the prophecy she made of herself when she sung her Magnificat: to bring glory to God and well being to a distressed world.

¹ Cf. 1, Peter 2.14.

² J. Michl, "Der Weibessame (Gen. 3,15) in spat judischer und fruh-christlicher Auffassung," *Biblica* 33 (1952), 371, 476.

Cf. also on Gen. 3.15: *Biblica* 31 (1950), 95, 104. And *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* XIV (1952), 104.

³ C. Lattey, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* VIII (1946), 369; IX (1947), 89, 147.

⁴ J. J. Collins, "Our Lady's Vow of Virginity," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* V (1943), 371.

⁵ J. L. Lilly, "Jesus and His Mother During the Public Life." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* VIII (1946), 52, 147, 315.

⁶ Bernard J. LeFrois, "Spiritual Motherhood of Mary." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* XIII (1951), 422; XIV (1952), 116.

⁷ Dominic J. Unger, "Did St. John See the Virgin Mary in Glory?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* XI (1949), 249. Cf. next five issues, also *Biblica* 31 (1950) 104.

⁸ Lebreton—Zeiller, *The History of the Primitive Church* (N.Y., 1949), p. 166.

⁹ Lebreton—Zeiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 1038 and note.

¹⁰ *DeHaeresi* iv, 12.

¹¹ Lebreton—Zeiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 111.

¹² Alexius M. Lepicier, *Tractatus de Beatissima Virgine Maria* (Paris, 1912) pp. 34ff.

¹³ Lebreton—Zeiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 987.

¹⁴ Lebreton—Zeiller, *Op. cit.*, pp. 527. 1170.

¹⁵ Lepicier, *Op. cit.*, p. 624.

¹⁶ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* XI (1949) 258.

¹⁷ Lebreton—Zeiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 1038.



OUTLINE

- Introduction: Man needs divine Revelation to know God's secrets. One of the most exalted of the divine mysteries is the almost incredible part Mary plays in our redemption.
- I. The Old Testament (1) unfolds God's plan for man's spiritual rehabilitation, and (2) prepares us for woman's part in its fulfillment through various feminine agents in God's messianic design, and especially in the texts, Gen. 3,15 and Isaias 7,14.
 - II. The New Testament identifies "the woman" and "the virgin" as Mary and traces her place in the story of (1) Christ's infancy, (2) His public life, and (3) His passion and death.
 - III. Tradition more explicitly enthrones the Mother of Christ in thoughts and devotions of all who have been blessed by her mission.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the connection between belief in Marian doctrines and acceptance of Sacred Scripture?
2. What is the significance of the term "virgin" in the text, Isaias 7,14?
3. Why is Mary not mentioned more frequently in the Gospel?
4. What is to be inferred from the prominence of Mary in the apocrypha?
5. What evidence is found in the New Testament of Mary's virginity?



MOTHER OF GOD

2

BY

REV. EDMOND D. BENARD, S.T.D., PH.D.

It was the night of June 22, in the year of our Lord 431. The city was Ephesus, in Asia Minor. Since morning, more than one hundred and fifty bishops had been assembled in the church of Saint Mary, under the authority and with the approval of the Pope. In the months preceding, Nestorius, the proud patriarch of Constantinople, had denied the right of the Virgin Mary to be called God's Mother, and the bishops were pondering gravely this new danger to the Christian faith.

After the day-long session, the bishops announced their decision. The Council of Ephesus solemnly condemned the teaching of Nestorius, deprived him of his patriarchal dignity, and reaffirmed the glorious title Christian tradition had always recognized as Mary's—the title "Mother of God."

All day the people of Ephesus had been awaiting the verdict of the Council. When word finally came, a great cry of joy went up from the crowd. The people escorted the bishops back to their lodgings with torches and burning incense. The streets and squares of the city suddenly flamed with light. It

was like the civic celebration of a victory—and it was a victory for the faith of Christ.¹

This passage happens to be one that I included in a talk delivered over the NBC radio network five years ago. I have quoted it here not only because it bears directly on our subject, but also because I thought you might be interested in the reaction of some of the people who heard it over the air. Up to the time of this broadcast, I had received—after each talk—only the usual very small proportion of hateful letters from those who resented the right of any priest to speak at any time on anything. But after the broadcast on Mary, I received letter after letter so violent and so denunciatory and in a few cases so obscene that they would make one's flesh crawl. Not until then did I actually realize that the fanatics whose hammers had smashed the statutes and leveled the shrines of our Lady through half of Europe had done their malicious work so well. I know, of course, that most of the people outside the Catholic Church today repudiate this violent spirit, and are embarrassed to think of the frenzy of some of the early "reformers" against our Lady, but the sickness of soul that produced this frenzy was a dreadful sickness, and the convalescence is long and slow. It was a sickness so acute that it left as its aftermath a loss of memory—a forgetfulness of the happy years when towering cathedrals like Our Lady of Paris, Our Lady of Chartres, and Our Lady's Nativity in Milan were raised at the crossroads of Europe as casually as wayside shrines.

There was one particular phrase in my radio sermon on our Lady that seemed particularly infuriating to the writers of the denunciatory letters: I had dared to call the Blessed Virgin: "Mother of God."

"Mother of God" is the subject that has been assigned to me for this paper. And I am happy that it is so. This current year is our Lady's year, solemnly proclaimed as such by the Holy Father; and it is inevitably a year in which we not only thank our Lady for what she has done for us, but a year in which we try—as far as lies in our poor power—to do something for her. One of the things we can do is try to make our Lady better known to and better understood by those who do not share with us the Catholic Faith. If, by thinking together about the title, "Mother of God," we are helped toward the duty and the privilege of explaining it to those who do not understand it (and who reject it *because* they do not understand it), we will have done a little bit towards furthering the purpose of this Marian Year.

The first thing we must realize about the title "Mother of God" is that, in the words of Cardinal Newman:

It is . . . an integral portion of the Faith fixed by Ecumenical Council . . . that the Blessed Virgin is Theotocos, Deipara, or Mother of God; and this word, when thus used, carries with it no admixture of rhetoric, no taint of extravagant affection, it has nothing else but a well-weighed, grave, dogmatic sense, which corresponds and is adequate to its sound. It intends to express that God is her Son, as truly as any one of us is the son of his own mother.²

"That God is her Son, as truly as any one of us is the son of his own mother. . . ." It is as simple and as clear as that. When we call Mary "Mother of God," we are not speaking in riddles; we are guilty of no exaggeration; we are using no poetic license. We are merely stating a fact.

Now the writers of the letters I mentioned a moment ago—the letters so abusively critical of the title "Mother of God"—

were fond of an argument they evidently regarded as a triumphant refutation of this "Catholic nonsense." The argument runs like this: how can God, who existed from all eternity, possibly be called the Son of a woman who did not begin to exist until a certain point in time?

We must not think, nor do I mean to imply, that it is only to people who write hateful letters that this objection is serious. No; there are people—and I have met a good number of them—people outside the Catholic Faith but who seem to be genuinely searching for the Truth, who are unable to understand how Catholics can believe and assert that Mary is God's Mother in the face of this objection. It is to such people that we as Catholics should be able and anxious to explain just what the title "Mother of God" means and why we apply it to Mary as part of our Catholic Faith.

First of all, what does it mean to be the mother of a son? We call a woman a mother when she has brought a child into the world. Now, when a child is born, there is, if we may so speak, a partnership between God and the parents. Into the body that is formed in the mother's womb, Almighty God breathes an immortal soul. In the birth of the baby, the parents have cooperated with God. But here is the point: would we deny to the woman who has given birth her right to the title "mother"—on the grounds that the baby's *soul* did not come from her, but from God? When a young mother proudly presents her baby for the admiration of a visitor to the home, has there ever been any visitor in history so stupid as to say: "One moment, my good woman! *I deny* your right to call yourself the mother of this child. You are mother of only *part* of the baby, and not the most important part, either. You are mother of your baby's body, not of his soul!" To say the very least, I do not think such a visitor would be invited back.

Long before the Judgment of Solomon, mothers have refused to see their babies cut in two.

So far, I think, so good. We have reminded ourselves that the title "mother" does not demand for its validity that the *totality* of the infant person come from the mother. And we have been speaking, not specifically about our Lord and His Blessed Mother, but in general about any child and any mother. For the next few minutes we will consider the unique miracle of the birth of Christ: the basic truth of the Christian Faith, the Incarnation—that God became man, that a man is God, and that a village girl of Nazareth was the meeting-place of human and divine.

The Divine nature of Christ our Lord did not come from Mary. The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, who took upon Himself a human nature, is God from all eternity. But the human nature of Christ was formed from the humanity of Mary, and so united to His Divinity that there are not two persons in Christ, but only one; and Mary is the Mother of the one Christ who is both God and man.

Now of course no human intellect can fully "explain" or comprehend the Incarnation. The Incarnation is a mystery. Unless God had revealed it to us as a fact, we would never even have suspected or imagined its existence. But once it has been divinely revealed to us, we can think about it and reason about it as far as our human intellects can carry us. We can be sure that there is no contradiction or no absolute impossibility involved in the fact that the one Person is both divine and human, that our Lord Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man.

The great scholastic theologians of the Church, in their treatment of the mystery of the Incarnation, have stressed the fact that there is a distinction between the separate notions

of person and nature. For instance, everyone of us is a particular person, separate from all other persons, distinct and individual. Everyone of us also has a human nature—a fact in which we are all alike. Our common human nature does not make us individual and distinct from one another; on the contrary, it is our joint possession of human nature that makes us similar one to another. Our final and ultimate distinction, each from each, springs from the fact that each one of us is a particular, individual, person. It is clear, then, that human personality and human nature—even though in the ordinary course of things they never exist separately—nevertheless are not the same thing. It is the person we are referring to when we use the word “I”; for instance, when I say that “I came to Louisville from Washington last night,” I mean that I as a person (not I as a human nature, nor I as a body, nor I as a soul)—I as a person came to Louisville from Washington last night. The theologians express this by saying that the person is the “subject of attribution”; which means that all I am and do is rightly spoken of in reference to me as a person, I do not say, “my foot kicked the football”; I say, “I kicked the football.” It is I the person who is “responsible.” I the person take the credit and bear the blame.

Surely the application of these principles to the Incarnation is clear. In Christ our Lord there is only one Person—the divine Second Person of the Trinity, God from all eternity and equal to the Father and Holy Spirit in all things. But in Christ our Lord there are two natures—the Divine nature and the human nature. All other men have human nature and are human persons; Christ has human nature but is a Divine Person. It is the Divine Person of Christ that is the “subject of attribution”; so we can say and must say that the one subject—that is the Person—born in time of the Blessed Virgin Mary

according to the flesh is the God-man Jesus Christ. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. And we saw his glory—glory as of the only-begotten of the Father—full of grace and of truth."³ The one Christ, the same Christ, the Christ who is Mary's Son, could say: "Before Abraham came to be, I am."⁴ He could say this because He is the eternal God, who always was and always will be. He could also say, using the same pronoun "I": "I lay down my life for my sheep."⁵ He could say this because His human nature is mortal like our own. The one Christ, the same Christ, who is the Son of the Almighty God is also the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and we have exactly the same reason for honoring Mary as God's Mother that we have for worshipping Christ as God.

In explaining the Catholic use of the title "Mother of God" it is necessary to do what we have just tried to do, however briefly and inadequately. It is necessary to speak of Christ our Lord. It is because Christ is what He is—God and man—that the Blessed Virgin is what she is—Mother of God. Which brings us to a point in our discussion absolutely imperative to an understanding of it. The attack upon the title "Mother of God" may *seem* to be an attack on a prerogative of our Lady; but it is really an attack upon the prerogatives of our Lord.

Let me put it this way. Leaving all considerations of theology, even all considerations of the Faith aside for a moment, Mary of Nazareth is certainly, as a simple historical fact, the Mother of Jesus of Nazareth called the Christ. Now, when anyone denies the right of Mary to the title of Mother of God, we should ask him a short and clear question: "Do you believe that Christ is God?" If he answers "Yes," then

of course we have the right to question further and say: "If Christ is God, and Mary is the Mother of Christ, how in the name of the simplest, most elementary logic, can you refuse to say that Mary is the 'Mother of God'?" If the person still persists in his denial of this title of our Lady we must either conclude that he is incapable of the slightest exercise of consecutive thought or else that really, deep down, he does *not* believe that Christ is God in the full and obvious sense of the word.

If, another possible case—to go back to our first question, "Do you believe that Christ is God?"—the answer should be the flat statement, "No, I do not believe that Christ is God," then of course such a person will deny to our Lady the title "Mother of God." But at least the field of disagreement is clear. The objector is not, basically, objecting to the Catholic teaching about Mary; he is objecting to the Catholic teaching about Christ.

Our Lady has had many sorrows; and I sometimes think that not the least of them is this: That an attack upon her should be used as camouflage for an attack upon her Son.

Believe me, my friends, what I have just said is not a flight of rhetoric; it is the sad record of history. Call the roll of the great heresies: they are denials, open or veiled, in general or in detail, either of the fact that Christ is true God, or of the fact that He is true man.

Space does not allow a full and detailed exemplification of this statement, but let us take one example—the most prominent and obvious one. We began this paper with a reference to the Council of Ephesus which, in the year 431, solemnly defined as a dogma of the Faith that Mary is the Mother of God. The definition came as an answer to the heresy of Nestorius, the newly-consecrated patriarch, who had denied Mary's

right to this title from the pulpit of his cathedral church in Constantinople. The fact is, however, that Nestorius' denial of the title "Mother of God" was the consequence of his heretical teaching about Christ. Nestorius held that in Christ there were not only two *natures*, but two distinct *beings*. For him, the man Christ was only the temple, the vesture or garment of the God-head; and he made a sharp distinction between the actions of Christ's human nature and the actions of the Divine Person. In other words, he denied that the one Christ, the same Christ, *is* both God and man. This is the core of the Nestorian heresy. It is not primarily a Mariological heresy, but a Christological one. The heresy against the Mother of God was basically a heresy against the Son of God.⁶

Incidentally, I make no apology for going so far back into history and talking about a heresy that was detected and condemned fifteen hundred years ago. Nestorianism is not dead. We meet it not only in history books; we hear it today from some of our non-Catholic friends repeated so confidently and enthusiastically that one gets the impression that they think they have invented it. They may never have heard of Nestorius, but their error is the same as his. And the answer of the Catholic centuries is still the same to them as it was to him.

The mention of heresy brings us to the final point of our discussion—a point that we as Catholics should delight to remember particularly in this Marian Year.

In the Office of the Blessed Virgin that every priest—and many devout lay-persons—read so often, our Lady is praised in the following significant words: "Rejoice, O Virgin Mary: you alone have destroyed all heresies throughout the entire world" (*Gaude, Maria Virgo: cunctas haereses sola interemisti in universo mundo*).⁷

What does this mean? In what sense can we say that our Lady by herself has triumphed over all heretical errors?⁸ Well, for centuries the great theologians of the Church have meditated upon this liturgical text and given us the fruit of their wisdom. In many different ways Mary triumphs over heresy, but the fundamental reason of her triumph is always her high privilege—the privilege on which is based all the honor we pay her in the Church, a privilege which earns for her her cherished place in every Catholic heart—her privilege of having been chosen to be the Mother of God.

As Mother of God Mary brought into the world to live among us Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, “the Author and Builder of the faith, the One who has overthrown all errors, the Lord and Saviour.”⁹ She is rightly called the destroyer of error who gave us as our elder Brother Him who is Truth Itself.

As Mother of God, Mary received from God the privilege of crushing the head of the serpent of deceit, the father of lies. She is forever the opponent of Satan, who works to lead men into sin just as effectively—and even more subtly—through their intellects and their pride of reason as through their bodies and the desires of the flesh.

As Mother of God Mary lives by the side of her Son in heaven, praying for her foster children on the earth. She is Mother of God and our spiritual Mother as well, knowing our needs and our dangers, interceding for us before the eternal throne. She prays not only that those who know the Truth might be defended and preserved for all their lives from error; she prays also for those who are sadly entangled in error’s heavy chains, that they may know the Truth that makes men free. Do you remember how John Henry Newman concluded his famous Letter to Dr. Pusey? Newman

had devoted most of the letter to a refutation of Dr. Pusey's criticisms of Catholic devotion to Mary; and Newman's last sentence was: "May that bright and gentle Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary, overcome you with her sweetness, and revenge herself on her foes by interceding effectually for their conversion!"¹⁰

It was Newman, by the way, who explained still another manner in which the Mother of God destroys all heresies, the last way we shall mention. Newman has pointed out to us that to destroy the sense of all the heresies of history, to bring their error clearly into the light, it is sufficient to call our Lady by her rightful title, "Mother of God." These are some of Newman's words:

... the confession that Mary is *Deipara*, or the Mother of God, is that safeguard wherewith we seal up and secure the doctrine of the Apostle from all evasion, and that test whereby we detect all the pretenses of those bad spirits of "Anti-christs which have gone out into the world." It declares that He is God; it implies that He is man; it suggests to us that He is God still, though He has become man, and that He is true man though He is God. By witnessing to the *process* of the union, it secures the reality of the two *subjects* of the union, of the divinity and of the manhood. If Mary is the Mother of God, Christ must be literally Emmanuel, God with us. . . . You see, then, my brethren, in this particular, the harmonious consistency of the revealed system, and the bearing of one doctrine upon another; Mary is exalted for the sake of Jesus. It was fitting that she, as being a creature, though the first of creatures, should have an office of ministration. She, as others, came into the world to do a work, she had a mission to fulfill; her grace and her glory are not for her own sake, but for her Maker's; and to her is com-

mitted the custody of the Incarnation; this is her appointed office—"A Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and they shall call His Name Emmanuel." As she was once on earth, and was personally the guardian of her Divine Child, as she carried Him in her womb, folded Him in her embrace, and suckled Him at her breast, so now, and to the latest hour of the Church, do her glories and the devotion paid her proclaim and define the right faith concerning Him as God and man. Every church which is dedicated to her, every altar which is raised under her invocation, every image which represents her, every litany in her praise, every Hail Mary for her continual memory, does but remind us that there was One who, though He was all-blessed from all eternity, yet for the sake of sinners, "did not shrink from the Virgin's womb." Thus she is the *Turris Davidica*, as the Church calls her, "the Tower of David"; the high and strong defence of the King of the true Israel; and hence the Church also addresses her in the Antiphon, as having "alone destroyed all heresies in the whole world."¹¹

I will forbear to summarize a discussion which has been in itself only the sketchiest of summaries of what might be said about the title "Mother of God." We have, always, all of us, the constant responsibility of making our Blessed Lady better known in the world. May God grant that we become really and devotedly conscious of this responsibility during the Marian Year. If our Lady is not loved by everyone in the world, it is only because she is not known to everyone in the world. We can help to make our Lady live for others as she lives in our own hearts. And when she lives again for those now strangers to her, they will waken from their long amnesia as from a troubled dream.

¹ Benard, *The Everlasting Kingdom* (Washington, D.C.: The National Council of Catholic Men, 1948), p. 42.

² *Difficulties of Anglicans*, II (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 62.

³ *John* 1: 1,14.

⁴ *John* 8: 58.

⁵ *John* 10: 15.

⁶ A good, brief and popularly written account of the major heresies may be found in M. L. Cozens, *A Handbook of Heresies* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1945).

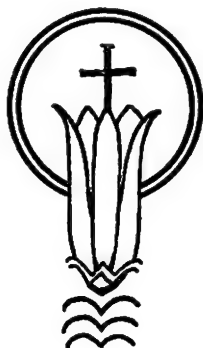
⁷ Common Office of the Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, first antiphon of the third nocturn.

⁸ There is a fine treatment of the meaning of the antiphon in Joseph Clifford Fenton, "Our Lady and the Extirpation of Heresy" (*The American Ecclesiastical Review*, CXIV, 6 (June, 1946)).

⁹ Francis Sylvius, *Opera Omnia* (Antwerp, 1698), V, 112. A careful summary of Sylvius' famous sermon on the *Gaude Maria Virgo*... is given by J. C. Fenton, *art. cit.*, pp. 445-47.

¹⁰ *Difficulties of Anglicans*, II, 118.

¹¹ *Discourses to Mixed Congregations* (London: Longmans, Green, Co., 1906), pp. 347-49.



OUTLINE

Introduction: Radio talk on "Mother of God" still arouses ire of fanatics and shows need to explain doctrine clearly.

I. Meaning of the doctrine

1. The doctrine is a fact.
2. What it means to be the mother of a son.
3. The distinction between person and nature in the mystery of the Incarnation applied to Mary's relation to Jesus.

II. The attack upon the title "Mother of God" is really an attack upon the prerogatives of our Lord.

1. If one believes Christ is God and Mary is Christ's Mother the logic is inescapable.
2. The heresy of Nestorius exemplifies the thesis.
3. Mary's triumph over heresy explained in the words of Cardinal Newman.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is there so much bitterness among some outside the Church against Mary's divine maternity?
2. Summarize in simple words and briefly the theological reasoning behind the doctrine of Mary, Mother of God.
3. How is an attack upon the prerogatives of our Lady also an attack upon those of our Lord?
4. In what sense is Nestorianism not dead?
5. How does Mary triumph over all heresies?



MARY EVER VIRGIN

3

BY

REV. EDWIN M. LEIMKUHLER, S.M., M.A.

A PASSING thought on the various topics in this series may give one the impression that this lecture on "Mary Ever Virgin" is perhaps the most difficult of presentation with perhaps the least practical interest and application. I concur somewhat in the former assumption, and therefore beg your kind indulgence lest I weary you with the necessary length of this development. But I do not agree with the latter assumption, for no phase of the study of Mary is uninteresting or tedious to those who truly love her. And the more difficult the aspect of the study of Mary the richer are the findings of the marvelous works of God in her behalf. For it has been truly said by her great client St. Bernard, "de Maria numquam satis" (never enough about Mary).

The doctrine of the Church concerning Mary's virginity comprises three truths: that she was a virgin in conceiving Jesus, the Son of God; that she was a virgin in giving Him birth; and that she remained a virgin through her whole life. The theologians conveniently designate these truths under the

titles of her virginal conception, her virginal motherhood, and her perpetual virginity. But for the average Catholic these truths are deeply entrenched in his faith in the terse language of the sixth Ecumenical Council (680) that the "virginity of Mary . . . remained before, during and after parturition," or in the even more succinct words of Pope Pius IV, in the Constitution *Cum quorundam*, issued August 7, 1555, that Mary was and is a virgin, "*ante partum, in partu, et post partum.*"¹ Let us consider the doctrine of "Mary every Virgin" under these three headings.

I. THE VIRGINITY BEFORE CHILDBIRTH

Mary's virginity before childbirth means that she was a virgin at the time of the Annunciation and that she remained a virgin while becoming the Mother of God. The latter statement means that she conceived the Son of God without any action of a natural principle of production, but by the supernatural action of the Holy Ghost, who rendered her fertile by a miracle of His omnipotence to whom "nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

This phase of the doctrine under both its aspects is a revealed truth, explicitly given in the Gospel narratives to the first Christians. They must have found this revelation quite natural, seeing in it, as it were, a logical corollary to the Divinity of Jesus. Moreover, they recalled the prediction of the prophet Isaias that "a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son" (Isa. 7:14, Matt. 1:23). St. Luke told them of the fulfillment of this prophecy when the angel Gabriel was sent "to a virgin" . . . and the "Virgin's name was Mary" (Luke 1:26-27). He also assured them of her virginal conception in his faithful recounting of the words of the angel: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall

overshadow thee; and therefore the Holy One to be born shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). St. Matthew taught them the same doctrine in these words: "When Mary His Mother had been betrothed to Joseph, she was found, before they came together, to be with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18). And the angel told Joseph in a dream to take to him Mary his wife, "for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20).

The Scriptures are so explicit on this phase of Mary's virginity that some theologians are wont to say that God did not wish to leave the faithful exposed to the hesitations and perplexities which would have been caused by a merely implicit revelation of this miraculous conception. In the normal process of inquiry their curiosity must have been aroused over Christ's Divinity and His human origin. And how else could it have been satisfied than by questioning those who had lived in intimate friendship with Mary or Joseph, or perhaps with Mary herself? These theologians go on to say that God did not wish to allow even the least shadow of doubt to cross their minds on such a delicate matter.²

The sources of tradition verify the fact that succeeding generations of Christians did not have to make more explicit a belief which was so clear from the beginning. However, toward the end of the first century already they had to defend this doctrine against the Cerinthians and the Ebionites who, like others after them, rejected the Divinity of Christ and then logically had to attribute to Him an ordinary birth. The reactions of the Christians then and through the centuries have always rallied to a reemphasis of Mary's virginity and consequently also to her purity, her sanctity and her role in our redemption. In fact, the defense of Mary's virginity generally provoked more vehemence than the defense of any other of

her many prerogatives. This, in part, is the reason for the brief language of the many condemnations of the false doctrines on this point in the history of the Church.³

There are other sources of tradition which reveal that the Catechumens from the early times learned to know and believe this privilege of Mary's virginity. The early Creed, in the various forms used by the different bishops, invariably contained the article that Jesus "was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."⁴ Already in those first centuries Mary was not only designated as "Virgin" but the term "ever Virgin" was used in the sense of "the Virgin," and this proper name of the Mother of Jesus is found more often than her name of Mary.⁵

Tradition likewise confirms the virginal conception of Christ from the testimonies of the Fathers, like St. Ignatius the Martyr, St. Justin and St. Irenaeus.

1. *Appropriateness of the Virginity before Childbirth.*

St. Thomas lists the arguments that are usually given for the appropriateness of the virginal conception. They turn upon the harmony that exists between Mary's virginity and the divinity of her Son.⁶

In the first place, the very Divinity of Christ required Mary's virginity. It is appropriate that He who is the natural Son of God should have no earthly father, but only Him who is in heaven. In as much as Jesus is like us in His humanity, it is necessary that in His humanity He should have a temporal origin. And in as much as He is also the God-Man, consubstantial with the Father, it is necessary that His temporal origin should, in some way, be Divine. Theoretically speaking, human intelligence could perceive that the omnipotence of God could have arranged that His Son be born of an earth-

ly father and mother according to His humanity. There is nothing in such a thought which might prevent the Second Person from contracting a hypostatic union with a human nature thus formed. This hypothesis is precisely the point upon which all the difficulties of heretics centered against the Motherhood of Mary and why they took such offense at the expression "Mother of God" and wished to take this title merely in a figurative sense than as a true *Deipara*. But practically speaking, we can see the wisdom of God in what has been accomplished. Without His virginal origin, the Divinity of Jesus would have run the risk of not being admitted. And in having been born of a virginal Mother, the fulness of His humanity is more easily tenable in the understanding of the Motherhood of Mary, and the specific character of all maternal production. Let us recall here that the supernatural action of the Holy Ghost in the virginal conception did not exclude the cooperation of the maternal process in Mary, but rather explicitly brought it about. According to the early Creeds, both of the West and of the East, the divine action of the Holy Ghost and the action of Mary as Mother appear next to each other and in each other.⁷

The second argument of St. Thomas for the appropriateness of the virginal conception is based upon the Divine attribute of infinite purity. It is fitting that the Word, conceived eternally in the most complete purity, should be conceived virginally when being made flesh. This is not to imply that any reflection is cast upon marriage, but merely to recall that there are hierarchical degrees in states of life. After all, marriage has been raised by Christ to the dignity of the sacrament, whereas virginity has not. An essential difference between matrimony and the vow of virginity is discerned in the fact that in marriage the contracting parties act in the name of

Christ and the Church, and are entrusted with a special office in the Church. By taking religious vows, the member of the Church is more closely wedded to Christ, and so expressed more directly and perfectly the relation of Christ and the Church than in the case in matrimony, because it is after His own pattern. If this greater perfection of religious vows is not present in a sacramental act, as in the case of Christian marriage, it is present in an act that is a subjective, personal dedication, and merits grace only *ex opere operantis*.⁸ It is unfortunate in our day that an improper opposition has led the world to set up a conflict between virginity and marriage. In the Christian sense the real distinction is between mystical marriage and sacramental marriage.⁹ In the light of this teaching the argument of St. Thomas means that, for the God of infinite purity, the most perfect purity conceivable was necessary for His humanity.

Another argument, a corollary to the above, can be briefly stated in this manner. If it was fitting that the human nature of Christ be exempt from original sin, it was necessary that it should not be formed by the ordinary process of human generation, but virginally. Some see an application here which throws light upon an understanding of marriage and virginity and membership in the Mystical Body. By being born of a virgin, Christ showed that membership in His Body should be constituted of a spiritual birth in the virginal womb of His Spouse, the Church. In other words, this means that the mind of God, having intended marriage from the beginning as the medium for delaying grace by propagation, and that order having been lost by the sin of our first parents, He now reserves admission to membership by baptism from the virginal womb of the Church. Hence, marriage, although a divine institution from the beginning, and raised to the dignity of a

sacrament by Christ, nevertheless falls short of its high ideal as a consequence of original sin and, while still holy, yielded to a higher type of perfection in the religious vow of virginity.

There are two other arguments advanced by St. Thomas for the appropriateness of the virginal conception that deserve mention here: one concerns the honor and dignity of the Holy Ghost, who overshadowed her virginal womb; and the other is concerned with the honor and chivalry of St. Joseph who was commissioned to be the protector and guardian of his chaste spouse.

Before ending our considerations of the virginal conception it is proper in this Marian Year to mention some other arguments of fitness and propriety that concern the perfection of Mary herself. Could He who delights to be among virgins, exclude from this choice company that Mother whom He loved more than all other virgins together? He willed her to be superior to all other creatures; and without the virginal conception, she would have been inferior, from the point of view of purity, to Christian virgins. By the same token, the excellence of her vocation as Mother of God demands the virginal conception. Moreover, in becoming the Mother of Jesus, Mary became also the spiritual Mother of all men. As Mother, she should be able to help her children in their needs and dangers. But we all know that of all the dangers that menace the soul, the most fatal for the number are temptations against purity. Now it is precisely the thought of Mary's virginity that helps them so effectively to dispel them. It was Cardinal Newman who said that "It is the boast of the Catholic religion that it has the gift of making the young heart chaste, and why is this? but that it gives us Jesus Christ for our food and Mary for our nursing Mother."

II. MARY'S VIRGINITY IN CHILDBIRTH

Just as Mary conceived her Son in an all pure manner, so she likewise gave birth to Him in an all pure manner. This simple statement does not only mean that the former is the foundation for the latter and the latter is the supplement of the former. It also means that the two actions are governed by the same supernatural principle, the "overshadowing" of the "power of the Most High" (Luke 1:35).

The older form of the Creed expresses it by the formula: "born by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,"¹⁰ and according to the traditional explanation of the Church, the action of the Holy Spirit must be connected with the birth of Christ. The latter took place through the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit in such a manner that the bodily integrity of the mother was in no wise violated, and Mary retained her virginity in bringing forth, as she did when she conceived. This is what we believe concerning virginity during childbirth.

Here is how the Council of Trent expresses it: "The conception of the Savior is above all the laws of nature, and His birth is no less so; it is Divine. And what is astounding, what surpasses every thought and every word, is that He was born of His Mother without causing the least injury to her virginity. Just as, later on, He left His tomb without breaking the seal which closed it, or just as he entered the house—the doors being shut—where His disciples were gathered, or—to take a comparison from ordinary happenings—just as the rays of the sun pass through the crystal without breaking or damaging it, so too, but in an ineffably more marvelous manner, Jesus Christ left the tomb of His Mother without in the least violating her virginity. We are, therefore, perfectly right in honoring in her a perpetual virginity and a perfect integrity.

This unheard-of privilege was the work of the Holy Spirit, who assisted in the conception and in the birth of Mary's Son in such a way that He communicated to her the fertility of the Mother while preserving in her the integrity of the virgin."¹¹

A few observations upon this text may help clarify the meaning of the doctrine. The first part of it upholds the usual argument by referring to the privilege of Mary's virginity in childbirth as a supplement to the virginal conception. The latter part of the text, with its references to the manner of the birth, has recourse to language of the Fathers of the Church in showing how the eternal Father was directly instrumental in having Christ come forth from the bosom of the virgin in a manner harmonizing with His dignity and His first origin in the bosom of the Father. It corresponds with His eternal production as the *lumen de lumine* (light of light), as a light poured forth into the world from the bosom of the virgin; and His quality of *virtus Altissimi* (power of the Most High), in the way God by His own power penetrates the limits of nature without violating them; and also the forming of His body by the Holy Ghost, who made it *corpus Verbi* (the body of the Word), in the way spirits penetrate bodies without resistance. In this sense the Fathers of the Church call the birth of Christ, and likewise His conception, a miraculous and supernatural birth, a heavenly, a divine, and spiritual birth.¹²

From this we may deduce that the first and most essential element in the supernatural birth of Christ lies in the fact that He appeared from the bosom of His Mother—the womb being closed and sealed—as He later appeared at His Resurrection from the tomb which was closed and sealed. The second element is naturally consequent upon the first, namely, that the

birth of Christ was also effected without pain to the Mother, just as it took place without the violation of the bodily integrity of the Mother. The third element lies in the fact that the birth involved for neither the mother nor the child the so-called burdens of natural birth. The last two points are consequences of the first, but still find their special reasons in the dignity of the mother and in that of the child.

1. *Proof of Mary's Virginity in Childbirth.*

The proof of Mary's virginity in childbirth is contained in the prophecy of Isaias: "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son" (Isa. 7:14). The text is certainly Messianic, and hence the virgin is Mary. The rationalists raise a philological question on this text and say that the Hebrew version of *alma* should be translated "young woman," and not "virgin." Our reply is that biblical usage justifies the meaning of "virgin" for *alma*, as is evident from the versions. The Septuagint translates it as "the" virgin. Moreover the context requires that sense, for a prodigious event is prophesied. The prophet announces the conceiving and bringing forth by the virgin as a great sign or miracle. In the original text he also uses the participial construction which reads: "Behold a virgin pregnant and giving birth." If this is not the sense of the text and context the prophecy no longer has any meaning.

In the New Testament, St. Matthew (1:18-23) quotes this prophecy and relates it with precise details of the virginal conception of Jesus by virtue of the Holy Spirit. St. Luke (3:23) in his account of the genealogy of Jesus states that Christ was thought or reputed to be the son of Joseph. But this same evangelist, who gives us most of the details of the birth of Christ, does not record the fact of the virginal birth, perhaps because it did not present the same importance as that of the virginal conception. Yet, he does say, most direct-

ly, that "she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger" (Luke 2:7). This delicate manner of expression could be quite in agreement with his way of implying certain things (Luke 2:18; 1:56). While this passage may not be certain proof of the virginal birth, at least, it harmonizes with the condition of a woman not subject to the suffering and travail of natural childbirth.

The authority of the Fathers is abundant on this point of the virginity of Mary in childbirth. They wrote vehemently from all parts of the early Church against those who denied it. It may suffice to mention the names of St. Ignatius, St. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St. Ephraem, St. Gregory Nazianzus, St. Ephiphanius, and especially St. Jerome who wrote several times against the errors of Jovinian.

The strongest argument for the virginity of Mary in childbirth arises from the authority of the Church. It is implicitly asserted in the early Creeds by the phrase "born of the Virgin Mary" and implicitly contained in the proclamations of faith along with the virginity before and after childbirth. But it is explicitly proclaimed by Pope St. Leo, By Pope Martin I at the Council of the Lateran (649), by Pope Leo III and by Pope Paul IV. We have seen already that the Council of Trent taught the same doctrine against the errors of that century.¹⁸

The voice of the early liturgy likewise mentions the virginity in childbirth. In the preface of the Blessed Virgin Mary we pray "and the glory of her virginity still abiding, gave forth to the world the everlasting Light, Jesus Christ our Lord." In the Communicantes for Christmas we pray: "communicating and keeping this most holy night, in which the spotless virginity of Blessed Mary brought forth a Savior to the

world." In the "Alma Redemptoris Mater" we sing "Thou virgin before and after."

The theological reasons for the virginity in childbirth generally turn on the harmony between the two main doctrines of the Divinity of Christ and the Divine Maternity of Mary, to which any corruption was repugnant. St. Thomas lists three of them. 1) The Word, who is conceived and who proceeds eternally from the Father without any corruption of His substance, should, if He becomes flesh, be born of a virgin mother without detriment to her virginity. 2) He who came to remove all corruption should not by His birth destroy the virginity of her who bore Him. 3) He who commands us to honor our parents should not Himself diminish by His birth the glory of His holy Mother.

By way of conclusion to this part of our study, it may be said that, in a certain sense, the virginity of Mary in childbirth demonstrates even better than the virginity before childbirth the esteem in which Jesus holds virginal purity. Especially does it show the infinite delicacy of His love for His Mother, since, by this miracle He preserves in Her not only that which constitutes the essence of virginity but even that which constitutes its material perfection. For the first Christians, this was an evident factual proof of what they had always more or less felt, namely that Jesus wished His Mother to be as perfect in every respect, as is possible for a human creature to be, even in her body, although this perfection required an unheard-of miracle. This was an argument which they later utilized to great advantage when they affirmed the incorruptibility of her body and its glorious Assumption. For her virginity in childbirth, of itself, necessarily implies an absolute immunity from the curse of Genesis: "in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children" (3:16). Her Assumption,

solemnly proclaimed on November 1, 1950, is a logical consequence of the immunity from original sin. And so, for all generations this virginity of Mary is a subject of admiration and of joy, and an invitation to go as far as possible, after the example of Jesus, in venerating His Mother.

III. THE VIRGINITY AFTER CHILDBIRTH

By the virginity of Mary after childbirth we mean that Mary remained a virgin throughout her whole life. This is often called her perpetual virginity. This phase of her virginity is seen as a perfect complement of her virginal conception and veritably guaranteed by her virginity in childbirth. Because of the unique perfection of her person and whole being, this woman has been rightfully called in Christian tradition not only "ever Virgin" but specifically "the Virgin," and "Virgin of virgins." Since she was the bearer of the Son and the spouse of the Holy Spirit, she is taken possession of by God in the most sublime sense of the word. In short, she belongs to Him alone and without reserve.

This thinking stems from the lofty Christian concept of "the Virgin," which comprises permanence. If Mary is not the perpetual virgin, she is not deserving of the title "ever Virgin" and much less "the Virgin" or "Virgin of virgins." Now this perfection of virginity comprises three essential parts: 1) bodily integrity and purity, the material perfection of the virtue; 2) the formal perfection, the virtue of purity or the permanent virginal inclination of virginity of the mind and spirit; 3) and the virginity of the heart or freedom from all carnal motions and sensations.

Those who have denied the perpetual virginity of Mary have generally been those who likewise denied the Divinity of Christ, such as the Ebionites, the Arians, and the rational-

ists of a later date and of our day. Some others who have denied the doctrine have displayed a great wantonness in the domain of morals, such as Helvidius and Jovinian in the days of St. Jerome. The so-called Reformers of the sixteenth century, while upholding the divinity of Christ, opposed the perpetual virginity of mind and spirit, at least in so far as the vow is concerned, and partly also the virginity in childbirth. It could have been that this tendency was consequent upon a minimizing of the living efficacy of the Divinity of Christ in such doctrines like those of the Eucharist and the foundation of His Church. If so, then it is understandable how the tendency led to the minimizing of the vow of Mary and the rejection of the ideal of consecrated virginity, which is the most perfect expression of the union of Christ with His Spouse, the Church.

Whether this hypothesis has any merit or not, it throws some light upon the question as to why the perpetual virginity of Mary has been the area of greatest discussion. However, there are other reasons for the misunderstanding, either of the doctrine or its foundations, which are more generally given.

One of them is the fact that the Bible does not explicitly mention the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. It is understandable from this as to why those denominations who are wedded to the doctrine that the Bible is the sole rule of faith are at a loss to understand why we Catholics are given to this doctrine unreservedly. The answer is that we Catholics have faith directly and immediately from the teaching authority of the Church and mediately through the Bible. This is not to deny or minimize the value of the literal meaning of the Scriptures, especially when the truth is evident from the words of divine revelation, like in the Eucharist, but rather to recognize and accept another source of revelation, namely,

Tradition. In the theological sense, Tradition is the word of God concerning faith and morals, not written in any inspired book, but transmitted from Christ to the Apostles and from them to their successors down to us. In one sense, Tradition is the revealed word of God, and in another sense it is the living Magisterium or teaching power of the Church. And in our day it is becoming more and more evident, especially in this century year of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and in this fourth year since the official proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption, that Tradition, in the sense of the living Magisterium of the Church, is not confined to the past.¹⁴

1. Proof of the Virginity after Childbirth

It follows from what has been said that the Magisterium of the Church is the principal foundation for the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. That it is an article of faith is evident from the many early documents from the Councils and the Fathers. In most of them she is called "ever virgin," the significant topic of this discourse, and which title could not be justified if, after the birth of Christ, Mary had not remained a virgin, and had had other children.¹⁵ In the rest of these early documents the virginity of the Mother of God after childbirth is explicitly asserted.¹⁶

As to the proof from Scripture, we have already mentioned that the perpetual virginity of Mary after childbirth is not explicitly recorded. One reason for this could have been that it was not so necessary since it was known to many of the first Christians. Most certainly the disciples inquired, out of pious curiosity, concerning the relatives of Christ and found to their satisfaction that Mary had had only one Son, Christ our Lord. And the same is true of the non-Palestinian Christians, who were motivated by the same natural curiosity and

sought information from the most reliable sources. We are not surprised then to find that the most ancient tradition is unanimous on this doctrine.¹⁷

All of this does not mean to imply that Mary's perpetual virginity has no foundation in Scripture at all. There are several details mentioned where the virginity after childbirth is implicitly contained. There is Mary's response to the Angel at the Annunciation: "How shall this happen, since I do not know man?" (Luke 1:34). There is the fact that Mary is always called the mother of Jesus, as one gathers normally from the reading of the Gospels as a whole. Hence, the dying Christ while hanging on the Cross commended His Mother to St. John as her adopted son: "Woman, behold thy son," and to the disciple: "Behold thy mother." In other words, for want of other sons of Mary, this virgin disciple is chosen among the many others.

However, there are other passages in the Gospels that seem to refute our claim of Mary's perpetual virginity. These have been the object of much discussion ever since the days of St. Jerome. This is the place to answer those objections and I shall try to deal with them as briefly as possible under the threefold headings of Mary's perfect virginity mentioned above.

2. Mary's Bodily Virginity

We have already established that Mary's bodily integrity was miraculously preserved in the birth of her Son. This not only presupposes and reflects the virginal conception of her Son, it also guarantees the perpetual continuation of her bodily integrity to the exclusion of any other human conception by her.

St. Thomas sets forth the absurdity of the contrary supposition under a fourfold heading, each in connection with one of the persons concerned. 1) Christ, the Son of Mary, who must be the only-begotten as well as the First-born; 2) the Holy

Ghost, Mary's divine bridegroom, who must keep her as His exclusive temple; 3) Mary herself, who would have been guilty of the greatest ingratitude by forsaking her virginity; 4) Joseph, Mary's human bridegroom, who would have been guilty of the greatest temerity by violating the temple of the Holy Ghost.¹⁸

But we are to be concerned here with those scriptural passages which seem to indicate that Mary, after the birth of Christ, had conjugal relations with St. Joseph and had sons and even daughters by him, which obviously would have violated her bodily integrity.

1. Both St. Luke (2:7) and St. Matthew (1:25) refer to Christ with the expression "first-born son." It is said by some that this means that there were other sons born to Mary after him. The truth is that the expression designates in biblical parlance a "son born before any other." It does not necessarily suppose that other sons were born after him. Its definite meaning according to the Mosiac Law has legal connotation (Num. 18:15; Exod. 13:2ff; Num. 3:47ff). Therefore, every only child is a first-born. It is precisely in this sense that St. Luke uses the expression, for his intention is to prepare the reader for the presentation of Jesus in the Temple conformably to the law.

2. Another text which generally needs explaining to safeguard the truth of the Scriptures as well as the doctrine of Mary's bodily integrity, is that of St. Matthew (1:25) "And he did not know her till she brought forth her first born son." The objection raised here is that if Joseph did not know her "till," he did know her after. The same objection is raised in a previous verse of the same passage (Matt. 1:18) "When Mary his mother had been betrothed to Joseph, she was found, before they came together, to be with child by the Holy Spirit."

Here the same implication arises from the word "before." Now, oriental languages are far more precise in the use of such words "till" and "before." They definitely mark the point of time up to when a condition may prevail, as do our modern languages. But they do not imply futurity, i.e., they do not imply any change thereafter. There are other examples of this in Scripture (Ps. 109:1; Matt. 12:20; I Tim. 4:13). Hence, the obvious meaning of "came together" refers to dwelling under the same roof. But even if the term were to be used in the sense of the marital act, "it does not follow," writes St. Jerome, "that they came together afterwards; Holy Scripture merely intimates what did not happen." The same Saint argues against the heretic Helvidius of his day in this manner: "If I say: 'Helividus died before he did penance for his sins,' does it follow that he did penance after his death?"¹⁹

3. The third objection from Scripture against Mary's bodily integrity is the use of the phrase "brethren of Christ." It is made a dozen times and it is found in the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians and the First to the Corinthians. But this phrase offers no great difficulty, because in the Hebrew language the word "brethren" allows for a wider signification than that of children of the same parents. It is used generally to refer to cousins and relatives, whether distant or near. The book of Genesis (13:8) mentions that Abraham calls Lot his brother.

But this objection is generally not answered so simply as this. The question has an uncanny way of cropping up unexpectedly and in remote places. Sometimes it is tossed surreptitiously like a hand grenade in an attempt to demolish the Catholic position. There are other occasions when it is advanced in popular plays or in so-called best-sellers and with

apparently weighty arguments with overtones of historical and theological connotation.

The fact of the matter is that it was not until the third century that we find anyone to question the perpetual virginity of Mary. At that time it was Tertullian who objected. Toward the end of the fourth century the problem grew to greater proportions in the bitter disputes between the defenders of the monastic and celibate life against those who championed the equality of marriage with the vow of virginity. The defenders of married life pushed their arguments too far. They rightfully held that the marriage of Our Lady and St. Joseph was a true marriage, but in the heat of controversy they pictured these holy spouses as living a full married life and having children in the natural way. Helvidius became the spokesman for this faction, but he was silenced by the now famous treatise of St. Jerome "On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary against Helvidius." A few years later Jovinian revived the heresy and he was answered by St. Jerome in another treatise. St. Ambrose entered into the controversy about that time against the disciples of Jovinian. Following soon upon this the errors were formally condemned by the Holy See.

The passages from Scripture that are often quoted by those who still parrot the objection to Mary's bodily integrity are those from St. Mark (6:3) and St. Matthew (13:55-56) where the evangelists tell of one of the visits to Nazareth. When Jesus began to teach them in their synagogues, the people were astonished and said: "Where did he get this wisdom and these miracles? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren James and Joseph and Simon and Jude? And his sisters, are they not all with us?" (Matt. 13:55-56).

Now the mention of the "brethren" by name in these pas-

sages does not advance the challenge at all, but rather proves that they were cousins or relatives. The two "brethren" named James and Joseph are indicated elsewhere as the sons of another Mary, the sister of the mother of Jesus and wife of Clopas (John 19:25), who is called Cleophas in the Vulgate. This same James is particularly mentioned in the Epistle to the Galatians (1:19) as the brother of Jesus, but regularly named elsewhere (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15) as an apostle and son of Alphaeus. Now Clopas and Cleophas and Alphaeus is one and the same person. The names are used differently depending upon the pronunciation of the Hebrew word "Halphai." And if we accept the testimony of St. Hegesippus in the second century that Clopas was the brother of St. Joseph, then there was a double cousinship between James and Jesus. The reference to all this is to bring out the fact that Christian tradition, while a bit hesitant at first, has definitely established since the fourth century that the relationship of these two "brethren" was that of cousins of Jesus.

It may be in order at this point to mention that it is not necessary to accept the statement of some of the Fathers, particularly of the East, that the "brethren" of Jesus were sons of St. Joseph by a previous marriage. This was already rejected by St. Jerome. The only foundations for the belief are in the Apocrypha Gospels: "The Gospel of James" and "The Gospel of Peter." Herein St. Joseph is mentioned as having married at the age of forty, and that of this marriage which lasted forty-nine years until the death of his wife, six children were born, two girls and four boys. The youngest of these boys was James the Less, the brother of Jesus. The story goes on to say that one year after the death of his wife, St. Joseph was miraculously chosen at the age of ninety to be the spouse of Mary. He is supposed to have died at the age of 111.

St. Jerome characterizes these legends as so many dreams. But reasons are sometimes given for this extraordinary solution to the problem, which in itself does not challenge the bodily integrity of Mary. One of the reasons given is that the Greek language employs a special word to designate cousins while the word "brother" is restricted to the meaning which it has in modern language, a child of the same parents. The Hebrew use of the word does not have that restriction. Now the Hellenistic Christians definitely believed that Mary had no other sons. They came by this knowledge from the Gospels, learned it from Tradition, and understood the doctrine of her bodily integrity in the correct sense. It could have been that in their eagerness to safeguard the belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary at a time when some were trying to teach the equality of marriage and virginity that they seized upon this manner of doing so. Portions of these Apocrypha documents date from the end of the second century. The legends grew in popularity until the end of the fourth century, and are still in the Greek Church. But we may rightfully ask whether the marriage of our Lady and St. Joseph had to be subjected to the ridicule of such a difference in age, in order to safeguard belief in the bodily integrity of Mary? After all, the designs of God in this matter were to protect the maiden motherhood of Mary. This is why the commonly accepted belief is that they were a lovely young couple with perhaps just a slight difference in age.

We may sum up our arguments on the bodily integrity of Mary and flatly deny that she had other children: 1) Jesus alone is described in the new Testament as son of Mary. 2) The expression "brethren of the Lord" can designate any relative of Jesus. 3) The most famous of these "brethren of the Lord," concerning whose relationship we have some in-

formation, has definitely a mother other than the Blessed Virgin. 4) This mother seems to be either the sister or sister-in-law of the Blessed Virgin, wife of the brother of St. Joseph. The "brethren of the Lord" would therefore be first cousins of Jesus. 5) Catholic tradition, although hesitating for some time in establishing the identity of the "brethren of the Lord" has been constant since the fourth century in its affirmation of Mary's bodily integrity.

3. Mary's Virginitv of Spirit

Perpetual virginity, according to Christian Tradition, does not consist in bodily integrity alone. It also includes the virginity of spirit or the steadfast will to keep the bodily integrity for the honor of God. Holy Scripture offers us the basis for the fact that Mary had this disposition in the most perfect manner. It is found in her words to the Angel: "How shall this happen, since I do not know man?" (Luke 1:34). The only comprehensible meaning that can be given to her question is that Mary had already bound herself by vow to keep her virginity. This point is important for the full understanding of her virginity and the Church has stood guard over this doctrine down through the ages.

In the fourth century when Helvidius and Jovinian and their disciples were questioning her virginity, St. Ambrose expressly replied that "The Virgin was not only so in body but also in mind."²⁰

Calvin and his disciples raised a similar objection in later centuries. They admitted Mary's integrity of body in the virginal conception and in childbirth, but rejected the virginity of mind or spirit, on the ground that after the birth of Christ, according to Jewish custom, she had nuptial relations with St. Joseph for the procreation of other children, otherwise she wished to deceive her husband.

This objection challenges the existence and the validity of Mary's vow of virginity and draws upon Jewish custom as an argument. Now we know that even before the time of Christ the thought of freely chosen perpetual virginity was not strange to the Israelites, but we cannot prove or even suppose that others before Mary had taken a formal vow of virginity. But Mary's position can definitely be maintained from her answer to the Angel. The objection stems from a misunderstanding of some passages of the Old Testament that seem to indicate that entering upon marriage and its consummation were generally even commanded. But the real meaning of these passages merely promises fecundity to the marriages of the Israelites. What is true, upon a close study of the Old Testament texts on this point is, that the higher appreciation of virginity does not generally find expression, because of the divine decree that the Messiah should arise out of Israel. In other words, the striving for the propagation of the people of God had precedence over the observance of virginity. And as to the question of Mary's wishing to deceive Joseph in contracting the engagement and the subsequent marriage, there is nothing contradictory in Christian teaching to a marriage freely entered upon with the mutual agreement never to call for the marital act. It is this point that heightens the esteem with which we regard St. Joseph.

Because of these notions of the people of Israel and partly because of Mary's subsequent marriage, even some theologians were led to question the perfection of her vow. They taught that it was at first conditional, since she was not certain that the keeping of her virginity under all circumstances would be most pleasing to God. But this uncertainty need not be accepted. On the contrary, it may well be presumed that Mary took the vow not only out of love for virginity

in general, but also because of a clear knowledge that God had called her to take it. Such a conclusion is most conformable to the words of her question to the Angel. Moreover, there are theological reasons that support it, namely, the excellence of her virtue, the dignity of her Divine Motherhood, and the influence of the Holy Spirit.

4. Mary's Virginitv of Heart

Finally, one other essential part of Mary's perfect virginity is her virginity of heart or the freedom from all motions and sensations contrary to purity. Because of the union in her of the three elements of bodily integrity, virginity of mind, and virginity of heart, Mary is called the "Virgin of virgins." In other words, she is the ideal of virginity. Her love for virginity stood in direct relation to her fullness of grace and love of God in which she surpasses all saints. Moreover, by consecrating Mary to be His bride, God bound Himself to prevent every violation and defilement of her purity. In particular He bound Himself to make the interior violation of the virginity of Mary impossible. Not only is all this certain from the time of the conception of Christ, as a result of the physical completion of her espousal to God; but it existed previously as well, since Mary was already betrothed to God by His unconditional decree from the beginning. Such is the doctrine of the Church concerning "Mary Ever Virgin."

It may be fitting, by way of conclusion, to make a few observations concerning the relationship of Mary's Virginity with that of her Immaculate Conception, which doctrine we are particularly commemorating in this Marian Year.

From our vantage point of a century since the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, we can see with greater clarity the designs of Providence in having this first

of Mary's prerogatives reserved to modern times for official definition. We now see that doctrine like a beacon throwing illuminating light upon the whole range of the sacred mysteries of Christianity. It reflects the infinite purity and sanctity of God. It makes more manifest His perfect freedom in not being bound to the law of necessity in fallen man, for Mary was preserved free from original sin. Neither the sin of Adam nor the power of Satan can restrain God's infinite munificence. In the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God we have the crowning point and masterpiece of Christ's redemptive action.

Let us not forget, however, that it was the definitions of Mary's Virginity and her Divine Maternity in the fourth and fifth centuries that were the foundations of her great triumphs today in the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.

Not only has Marian doctrine progressed and profited from those earlier doctrines. Those earlier doctrines are still very much alive in the devotional life of Catholics today in the fuller application of the later doctrines.

I shall end with just one example. Mary's Virginity has always been the exemplar of perfect dedication and consecration. This is sound doctrine from the earliest days of Christianity. It remained for later centuries to hear the voices of Mary's great clients like St. Grignon de Montfort and Father Chaminade, the founder of the Marianists, to call for a total consecration to Mary in the highest manner possible. And ever since 1917 we have the same request from the words of Mary herself in the revelations at Fatima under the title of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Let us heed those words and consecrate ourselves under her patronage to the cause of Christ and that of His Church to

advance the great work of the lay apostolate of which she is also the exemplar.

In this year of 1954 we can appraise the fact that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception a century ago has contributed immeasurably to the inspirations and the sustained efforts that have converged and are converging upon the world-wide resurgence of the true Christian spirit, to help effect that reparation of mankind which has been immortalized in the motto of the saint-elect for this Marian Year, Blessed Pius X: "to restore all things in Christ."

¹ Denzinger-Bannwart, *Enchiridion*, 993.

² Neubert, *Marie dans le Dogme* (Paris: Editions Spes, 2e edition refondue, 1945), p. 200.

³ Cf. Denz. 20, 91, 113, 143 seqq., 201, 214, seqq., 282, 290, 344, 429, 462, 708, 735, 993, 1314, 1462.

⁴ Western form of the Creed: Denz. 1937, ed. 2. Eastern form of the Creed: Denz. 9, 86.

⁵ Neubert, *Marie dans l'Eglise Antenicene* (Paris: Gabalta, 1908) p. 57-120; 136-144.

⁶ Summa Theologica. IIIa. q. 28, a.1, a.3.

⁷ Denz. 2, 9, 86.

⁸ Scheeben, *Mysteries of Christianity* (St. Louis Herder, 1946) p. 605.

⁹ Flynn, "Apologia for Marriage," *Orationes Fratres*, (October 2, 1949).

¹⁰ Denz. 9, 86. "natus est ex Spiritu Sancto et Maria Virgine."

¹¹ Council of Trent. Part 1, Chap. IV, Section II.

¹² M. J. Scheeben, *Mariology* (St. Louis: Herder, 1946) II, p. 103.

¹³ Denz. 2183; 649; 256; 3029; 993.

¹⁴ Burghardt, "The Catholic Concept of Tradition," *Proceedings, Cath. Theol. Society of America*, 1951, p. 66-7.

¹⁵ Denz. 13, 201, 214, 218, 227, 255, 257, 344, 429, 463, 735.

¹⁶ Denz. 91, 256, 314, a nota 3, 734, 99.

¹⁷ Neubert, *Marie dans le Dogme*, Paris, Editions Spes. 1948. p. 208.

¹⁸ Summa Theologica. III, q. 28, a. 3.

¹⁹ St. Jerome, Lib. I Comment. in c. 1 Matt., P.L. 2625.

²⁰ De Virg. 1. II, P.L., 16, 219; St. Ambrose.

OUTLINE

Introduction: Division of the topic into three parts.

I. Virginity before Childbirth.

1. The doctrine is explicit in both Scripture and Tradition.
2. The appropriateness of the doctrine in the reasoning of St. Thomas.

II. Mary's Virginity in Childbirth.

1. The meaning of the doctrine.
2. Proof of the doctrine in Scripture and other sources.

III. Virginity after Childbirth.

1. Significance of the doctrine of perpetual virginity.
2. Since the doctrine is only implicit in Scripture, objections have arisen but are refutable, viz.:
 - a. Regarding Mary's bodily integrity and "the brethren of Jesus."
 - b. Regarding Mary's vow of virginity.
 - c. Regarding Mary's perfect purity.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is virginity considered a higher state in life than matrimony?
2. What mysteries of our Lord's life parallel Mary's virginity in childbirth?
3. How does Mary's virginity in childbirth demonstrate the esteem we should have for the virtue of purity?
4. What are the consequences of the denial of the perpetual virginity of Mary?
5. Can you demonstrate that "the brethren of Jesus" are not Mary's children?

4 HAIL, FULL OF GRACE



BY

REV. THOMAS U. MULLANEY, O.P.

“HAIL, Full of Grace.” With these words an Angel of God, for the first time in all Angelic history, bent reverently before a human person, as before a superior; for already before she was Mother of God Mary had, in sanctity, outstripped beyond description even the holiest of God’s ministering spirits. As Gabriel spoke his striking greeting it was to a miracle of sanctity that he paid reverence. That miracle was the Immaculate Conception.

Now, and in every generation that calls her blessed, Christian souls, too, reverence that miracle, which is a mystery. By a quasi-instinct of the faith we sense that the Immaculate Conception is somehow a thing gigantic, unaccountable. We know that it is so important that it is one of the very few points of Marian doctrine solemnly defined by the Church; and we know that the feast of the Immaculate Conception is one of the few holy days of obligation in the whole year. We both sense and acknowledge the importance of the mystery.

Yet, to understand that importance is another matter. In all reverence it might seem that Mary's sinless Conception is an event of the long distant past. We seem not close to it, nor it to us. Again, however, important it may be, it seems a personal glory of Mary, far exalted above any contact with our lives. We are not sinless, in origin, in activity, or in any way! So this mystery can seem distant from us.

Yet the truths that God has revealed to us have reference to our lives, for He revealed them to ennoble *these* lives of ours. This mystery, too, must have meaning even to us. In order to penetrate more deeply into that meaning I shall try here to do four things. First, simply to analyze the phrase "the Immaculate Conception"—this in order that what we are speaking of may be clear from the beginning. Second, I shall try to show how we know that in Mary there is a reality corresponding to the title. Third, granted a knowledge of what the Immaculate Conception is, and *that* it is, I shall try to indicate *why* it is; that is, why God bestowed this privilege upon Our Lady. Last, then I shall try to point out how this Conception of Mary has meaning and vitality for us.

I. THE NATURE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

To the question, what is the Immaculate Conception? we have a clear, definite answer. The Vicar of Christ, Pius IX solemnly defined this to be the Divine truth of the matter, that "the most blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin by the singular grace and privilege of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind."¹

The words of the Pope indicate all of the essential elements of this mystery.

First, who is the subject, that is, the one in whom this privilege is found? It is that person who is the Virgin Mary and she alone (for this is a "singular privilege"), not at some vague uncertain time of her existence but "at the first instant of her conception"; which means, in that moment of history, whenever it was, that her soul was created by God and infused into her body within the womb of her mother. We cannot point to a definite hour of a definite day in a certain year and say, "This was the instant of the Immaculate Conception." We simply do not know when it was; even if we did it would be relatively unimportant. The essential thing is that not for one single instant was Our Lady ever subject to Satan or to sin. In the instant in which her human life began, Divine life and love began in her, also.

Secondly, what precisely in Our Lady is her Immaculate Conception? It is her preservation "From all stain of original sin," her freedom from that enmity toward God which is the birthmark of all men. In Adam human nature sinned: from that moment to be conceived in human nature is to be conceived a sinner. You do not first have a man and then a sinner; no, original sin is a modification of our nature as real as our height or weight. It comes together with that nature, an inherited disease.

The marvelous aspect of the Immaculate Conception is that in Mary, contrary to the general law, there was humanity begotten in the ordinary way, but no sin; a human person but absolute freedom from the disease that infects all humanity. Her nature was exactly like our nature, yet she was conceived a friend of God, not the sentenced prisoner of Satan that other human persons are born.

Thirdly, by whose power was the Virgin delivered thus from sin, from complicity with Satan? It was by the omnipotence

of God who alone can bestow His love, His grace upon whomsoever He wills. God then is the source of the grace of Mary's Conception. It is not Our Lady's by any right or title of her own; it is too sublime, too Divine for that. It is totally God's doing.

Note that it is of faith that Christ, the Son of Mary is involved in causing His own Mother's original sinlessness. Some have argued, in past centuries, that Mary could not have been conceived without sin because then she would not need to be saved from sin by Christ. This would be contrary to God's truth, according to which the incarnate Son of God is "the Savior of all men."²

But the truth of Our Lady's spotless conception is in no way opposed to the truth that all men, including Mary, are saved in Christ. In the eternal wisdom of the Divine Father there was always, and is now, contained knowledge of Our Lord's sacrifice on Calvary. In the case of our Blessed Mother, God as it were anticipated the merit or the effect of the Passion of Christ. In view of that forthcoming Passion He produced in Mary's soul from the beginning the full splendor of sanctity which Christ, dying, was to earn for her, somewhat as a mother sure of her child's obedience might prepare in advance some reward though the obedient act is not yet performed.

They misunderstand, then, who think that the exaltation of Mary is an attempted diminution of Christ. In a true sense Our Lady is more dependent on Christ than we are, and more indebted to Him, precisely because she has received, and does receive, more from Him than any other creature will ever receive.

This, then, is an aspect of God's generosity. Long before Mary so joyfully clothed the Son of God in human flesh, her

flesh; God has already made her "the woman clothed with the sun," that is, with the warmth of His life and love.

Lastly to what purpose was the Immaculate Conception? In the words of the Holy Father it was that she might be "a fit dwelling place" or "a worthy Mother" of the Son of God. For, as so many of the Saints have asked, is it reasonable that the living flesh of the Son of God be taken from flesh that is the ally of Satan and of sin?

II. THE FACT OF OUR LADY'S IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Given some insight into the nature of this prerogative of the holy Virgin there can remain the problem of how the Church knows of so hidden, so subtle a mystery. Its cause was the invisible God, its beneficiary the soul of Our Lady alone; its nature secret, supernatural.

We can know of such a reality not by our native powers of discernment but only by God's revelation. Faith demands that we believe that God did reveal this doctrine of Mary's holy conception. Where shall we find this Divine revelation?

God's revelation is contained partially in Sacred Scripture, but more fully in what is called tradition; i.e., that body of sacred truth given orally by Christ to the Apostles, or by the Apostles themselves under the dictates of the Holy Ghost handed down even to us.³ The content of Divine tradition is evident in the teaching of the Church and in her life. The truth of Mary's Immaculate Conception can be discovered therefore 1) in Sacred Scripture; 2) in the doctrine of the great witnesses to Christian teaching; that is, the Fathers of the Church; 3) in that aspect of the Church's life which is the liturgy.

1. Sacred Scripture

On that day when sin first entered our earth the angry voice of God cast on men a threefold curse.⁴ But even before the curse was uttered there was already promise of deliverance, for to Satan God had said, "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."⁵ There was sin, now: but already, in promise there was also the victory over sin to be wrought by Christ and His Mother.

There is evidence that in the original text the one who is foretold as crushing the serpent's head is the *seed* of the woman; *he* not she.⁶ But the difference is, doctrinally, very slight. In either reading there is foretold by God 1) a perfect warfare, or enmity between the woman and her offspring on one hand and Satan on the other; 2) the outcome of this bitter struggle, namely the utter defeat of Satan, the absolute victory of the woman and her seed. The woman and her seed, associated in their hatred of the devil, are associated also in overcoming him.

Now the great Fathers and writers of the Church have seen in this prophecy an implication of Mary's Immaculate Conception.⁷ This for two reasons. Had the woman—who is Our Lady⁸—been at any time even in original sin, then her enmity toward Satan would be neither unique nor absolute as the prophecy demands. Had Mary then contracted sin she would have been an ally of Satan, his subject, the familiar of his household, not his singular, outstanding enemy.

Secondly, God foretold the complete overcoming of Satan. As Adam and Eve had just then been conquered by Satan, so were Christ and Mary in due time, to conquer him. They would conquer so absolutely that the head of Satan is to be crushed beneath the conqueror's heel. If Mary were, at any

time, Satan's victim through original sin would her victory be absolute, complete? He, too, would be to some extent, conqueror: she would have been in part defeated. Surely God's prophecy has not been, in part, voided!

We find also in Holy Scripture an account of that day on which God began the fulfillment of the prophecy He had long before uttered. "The Angel Gabriel was sent from God . . . to a virgin . . . and the virgin's name was Mary. And the Angel being come in said to her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women."

Familiarity must not dull our perception of the meaning of these words. Note first that the angel said not, "Hail, Mary" but "Hail, full of grace." This implies that in the sight of heaven and of heaven's messenger it is fulness of grace which is the distinctive personal property of this woman. Names, especially Divinely-given names, indicate the inner characteristic of things which set them apart from other things; that is why things which differ are called by different names. If Mary's truest name is "Thou who are full of grace" then in fulness of grace she is distinctive; i.e. she is above all other creatures, or different from them by reason of greater grace. Since the Angel so calls her then she is greater in grace even than Angels. Thus she ought not to lack a grace they have, namely the grace of a sinless origin.

Again the grammatical construction used by the Evangelist to express "full of grace" is a participial construction signifying a past condition now being continued. The sense is "You have been and now are so blessed by Divine favor to be overflowing with grace." So the grace now in Mary reaches backward: it is of the past no less than of the present. The complete, perfect sense of the words implies full sanctity in Mary's whole past, including then the past which is her origin.

Note, too, the Angel's words "The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou." Assuredly God was with Gabriel too, for Gabriel, like all the Holy Angels, looks upon the very face of God. But the force of the pronouns "Thee" "Thou" is that God's presence to Mary, His love of her is in some way unique, surpassing. Since God's love of creatures produces goodness in them—they are good to the degree God loves them⁹—then God's greater love of Mary ought not to have produced in her a goodness less than that of the Angels who are completely without sin.

Note lastly in this text that the Angel indicates that Mary's special holiness is a preparation for her unique dignity, the Motherhood of God. Always, God gives grace proportionate to one's office or dignity. Since the Divine Maternity is the greatest dignity God could give to any created person, then the grace proportionate to it is the greatest grace a created person can receive in God's actual Providence. But this grace ought to include freedom from original sin, otherwise a greater and more effective grace is easily conceivable, by us, and creatable by God. So Pius IX could write "The Fathers and writers of the Church . . . taught that this singular and solemn salutation which had never been heard elsewhere shows that the Mother of God is the seat of all divine graces . . . to such an extent that she was never subject to the curse and is together with her Son the only partaker of perpetual benediction."¹⁰

2. The Fathers and Writers of the Church

It is the living tradition of the Church with its strong roots in Apostolic infallibility which especially shows that the Church received from God knowledge of Mary's sinless conception. That tradition we have seen has a twofold manifestation: theoretical manifestation in the teachings of the Fathers and

writers of the Church, and practical manifestation in the life and liturgy of the Church.

So vast is the literature of the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers on the Immaculate Conception that I shall not attempt to summarize it here. I shall instead simply give some indication of the teaching of the writers of the first eight centuries. From then on the liturgy, as I shall show, manifests in a practical way the faith of the Church, (as well, of course, as the continued teaching of the ecclesiastical writers).

In the earlier centuries we cannot expect to find explicit mention of the Immaculate Conception. Theological discussion about original sin, and preservation from it was hardly possible at a time when the Church was fighting for her life first against vicious persecutions, then against frightful heresies. Yet in this era we do find express mention of Mary's freedom from all sin whatsoever. Clearly this includes freedom from original sin somewhat as if I say that a given individual is a completely virtuous man I imply that he is neither drunkard nor murderer.

Beginning from immediately post-Apostolic times we find in the Fathers a much used parallel between Eve and Mary, a natural development from the parallel between Adam and Christ taught by St. Paul.¹¹ The parallel as developed, for example, by St. Justin, St. Irenaeus, Tertullian, St. Ephraem, and others, is that as the first Eve, though the mother of death, came from the hands of God immaculate, innocent; so did the second Eve, Mary, and with even greater reason since she is the mother of life.¹²

In particular St. Ephraem writes—and he is addressing the Lord—"It is Thee and Thy mother, who alone are, in every way beautiful: for in Thee O Lord there is no blemish, nor in Thy mother any stain."¹³ This surely is strong language: so

great is Mary's freedom from the slightest sin that in this regard she can be compared to no other human person but only to the all-holy Son of God. With us she has no bond of original sin. Therefore St. Ambrose speaks of Mary as "unstained by any stain of sin!"¹⁴ And the great Augustine says that concerning Our Lady he will allow "no discussion when it is a question of sin."¹⁵

About Augustine's time we find St. Theodatus writing "The Virgin (is) included in the womanly sex but without share in the sin of woman; the Virgin innocent, unstained . . . holy in soul and body, as a lily among thorns."¹⁶ And in the same age St. Proclus points out that "it is not unfitting that the architect dwell in the home that he himself has built; and mire does not stain the workman when he restores the vessel he had made. So nothing that came from the Virgin's womb stains the most pure God. From her whom he had fashioned beyond reach of all stain no stain originates."¹⁷ St. Maximus put it that "Mary was a fit dwelling place for Christ . . . on account of her original grace."¹⁸

A bit later we find Theophane praising our Blessed Mother as Spotless Queen untouched by any stain.¹⁹ And St. Fulgentius has it "In the spouse of the first man the wickedness of the devil perverted (her) mind; in the mother of the second Adam (God) preserved intact mind and body."²⁰ And he writes that the Angel Gabriel in his salutation to our Lady "manifests the total exclusion of the wrath of the first judgment, and that the full grace of blessing has been restored."²¹ In Mary then original fault is excluded.

St. Sophronius cries out to her "Before God thou hast complete grace . . . everlasting grace. Thou hast grace no other has received . . . none but thee is purified beforehand."²² And again she is "immaculate . . . completely free from every

stain."²³ St. Modestus declared "she is more holy than the Cherubim and Seraphim" and "to her sin never had access,"²⁴ as of course it did not to them. Very accurately St. John Damascene phrases it "nature cedes to grace, and stops, tremulous, unable to go further. . . . Nature dared not go before the seed of grace. So nature remained destitute of fruit, but grace fructified."²⁵ Grace indeed prevented the natural origin of Mary from producing its normal fruit of sin.

3. The Liturgy and Acts of the Holy See

Together with these doctrinal testimonies to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary we find very practical measures by which the Church inculcated this truth.

The first of these is the special feast of the Conception of the Virgin. While its exact origins are obscure there is evidence that the feast was already observed in the East in the seventh and eighth centuries; in the ninth century it was also kept in such places as Sicily, Ireland, and parts of Italy. This is remarkable when we consider that so great a feast as that of Corpus Christi was introduced only in the thirteenth century, and that of Christ the King in the twentieth. Since as Pius IX wrote "the Church celebrates feasts only of things that are holy" this feast was a true indication of the spotless sanctity of Mary's conception. In time the feast was made a day of obligation, emphasizing the importance of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

More than this, the Church granted indulgences to those who celebrated this feast; approved religious associations founded in honor of Mary's Immaculate Conception; and promoted the dedication of churches, monasteries and nations to the Immaculate Conception.

Long before the dogma was defined in 1854 the Popes had

taken steps to safeguard this truth. Thus Sixtus IV promoted it, and strongly restrained those who opposed it, some four centuries before the definition.²⁶ Pius V officially condemned the contrary teachings.²⁷ Alexander VII insisted on the dogmatic truth as the object of the feast of Mary's Conception.²⁸

Must we not say then with Pius IX "Small wonder that the pastors of the Church . . . and the faithful glorified daily more and more in professing . . . this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God which was recorded in the Divine Scriptures according to the judgment of the Fathers; which was handed down by so many testimonies of these Fathers . . . which was celebrated in so many illustrious monuments of venerable antiquity; which was proposed and confirmed by the weighty and deliberate judgment of the Church."

III. THE REASON FOR THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

When we have seen that a certain point of doctrine is divinely true we are only at the threshold of the Mystery. Like a child who for the first time looks upon the ocean and asks "Why is it there? What is it for?" we, too, faced with the mystery of Mary's spotless origin begin to wonder, "Why did God make her immaculate? What does it do to her, and to us, this holy conception?"

An adequate answer to the first question must await heaven for only Divine Wisdom really knows Divine motives. We can say this much, however: such is the beauty, the splendor of the Immaculate Conception that only infinite wisdom could devise it; and having devised it that wisdom was, as it were, enamored of His handiwork and came at last to dwell within her who is the Immaculate Conception. The full glory of

Mary's sinless conception we cannot, in this life, fathom. We can though, and should attempt to see to some degree the purpose, the fittingness, of so great a privilege. I should like, therefore, to point out some aspects of its fitness with respect to us.

This privilege of Mary's is most fitting with regard to God; that is, with respect to each of the Persons of the Divine Trinity.

First with respect to the Father. It is a general rule of God's Providence—a rule which God jealously enforces and violations of which He severely avenges—that what is consecrated to the service of God must be holy and clean. Now Mary was to be consecrated to the service of God: but much more than that she had been predestined to be really and substantially associated, as no other creature was to be, in the generation of God's own Son. God the Father eternally conceives, eternally gives birth to His Word Who is the Son. In that Divine fecundity of God the Father, Mary participates: for she, too, in virginal fashion, conceived and brought forth that same Son. Could the Father Who everlastingly begets His Word in infinite sanctity, have given the Son Whom He loves as Himself, to one who had been defiled? Could the Father have cast His Son into a fetid mass of filth, there in His humanity, to be fashioned?

Secondly with respect to God the Son. We must understand that from all eternity the Word of God loved the Virgin Mary above every other creature, angelic or earthly. The proof of this is that He willed to give to her a gift above all other gifts, a gift given to no other of the children of God—the gift of Himself. For Mary's Motherhood of God implies between Christ and her such closeness of union as to exceed all human language. This much theologians do say: Mary's union with

God as His Mother is a far greater thing than the Vision of God which the saints enjoy in heaven. Now, then, if the all-powerful Son of God willed to give to Mary so unique a gift, would He fittingly have withheld from her the much lesser gift of a spotless conception? Does a parent give its child life and love, but refuse it food? Does a husband give his wife his whole heart and life but refuse conversation?

There is a special fitness here: for it is the same God who was born of the Virgin who commanded "Honor thy father and thy mother." Surely He Himself, true God, honored His Mother in every fit way, safeguarded her from the worst ignominy humanity knows—its own sin.

Thirdly, Mary's all-pure conception is most fitting with regard to the Holy Ghost. Of old it was said to Mary "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee."²⁹ For the human body of the word of God was formed in Mary's womb by no human agency, but by the direct, immediate and divine activity of the Holy Ghost. She is His cooperator: she is, as the Church's liturgy has it, the spouse of the Holy Spirit. Should the power of the most pure God have for its substantial associate sin-rotted flesh? Should the Spouse of the all-holy Spirit have been Satan's sinful ally? During those months that the Son of God dwelt, in human flesh, in Mary's womb Mary was indeed the very sanctuary of the Holy Spirit: for wherever God the Son is, there is the Holy Spirit being breathed forth by Him. Should the living temple of the living God have been a desecrated and defiled thing?

From the point of view now of our Blessed Mother her Immaculate Conception was most proper and fitting. Again we touch here upon the profound mystery of Mary's predestination, the mystery of her place, her dignity among all

God's creatures. Pope Pius IX wrote of Our Lady that "her origin was preordained by one and the same decree with the Incarnation of Divine Wisdom,"³⁰ and Pope Pius XII wrote of "the revered Mother of God from all eternity joined in a hidden way with Jesus Christ in one and the same decree of predestination."³¹ Mary then is indissolubly linked, by eternal election, with the Incarnate Word of God.

Mary is, subordinately to Christ and dependently on Christ, at the very apex of God's creation set in sovereign, singular splendor above all things else. Through her, and proximately from her, God so willing, come all graces unto all men: and she is set in majesty even over God's Angels, their Queen, indescribably more exalted than they. The whole supernatural world is like unto the solar system: Christ is "the Sun of justice," the center of all else whence proceeds light and warmth; but Mary is "the woman clothed with the sun,"³² having, that is, fulness of participation of the life-giving truth and love of Christ. Among all created persons she is God's masterpiece: she alone is all holy, all pure: all others are in some true sense for the sake of Christ's glory and hers. That is why the Church applies to her the words of Scripture which were written, as Pius IX pointed out, of the uncreated Wisdom of God "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before He made anything from the beginning. I was set up from eternity, and of old before the earth was made. The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived . . . the mountains with their huge bulk had not as yet been established: before the hills I was brought forth. . . . When he prepared the heavens, I was present: when with a certain law and compass he enclosed the depths . . . I was with him forming all things . . . and my delights were to be with the children of men."³³

Because Mary is "from all eternity joined in a hidden way with Jesus Christ in one and the same decree of predestination";³⁴ and because the glory of Christ is indeed the proximate goal, of all creation in God's *de facto* Providence, Mary, precisely in her unique union with Christ, is in a true sense final cause of all lesser creation.

With this, is the darkness, the corruption of sin compatible? Can this masterpiece on which God lavished everlasting love, and which He so eagerly chose, fashioned, beautified: can it have been the ornament of Satan's realm of ugliness? Is it conceivable that the noblest and best loved thing God ever made be a failure, and hateful to God? Surely Divine omnipotence, Divine love cannot so have failed.

Finally, Mary's Immaculate Conception is most fitting to us also in the sense that it is most helpful. We shall see that that Conception is profoundly involved in our own sanctification: but for the moment I should like to point out this much only, that this privilege of Our Lady is to us the guarantee of our dignity, the vision of human achievement. Her Conception speaks to us of God's love for mankind: for only Divine love could have fashioned such magnificence in one of our race. This, too, we know: the Immaculate Mother of God is our Mother. The wealth of grace and favor divinely bestowed upon her she seeks to share with us, more surely than a good mother on this earth shares with her children the good things of the family. Mary's Immaculate Conception therefore is the ideal of human dignity: and much more than that, it is the promise of our own accomplishment: for what Divine love achieved in her, that same love, through her, shall in some measure achieve also in us, her children.

IV. THE MEANING OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

One final question remains. Of what practical importance is Mary's Immaculate Conception? The question has real meaning for the reasons I pointed out at the beginning of our discussion, namely, that this mystery seems to be a mere historical fact which has been completed, finished with, many centuries ago; and secondly that, as "a singular privilege" it seems to pertain to Mary alone. Thus the dogma itself can seem unrelated to our lives.

Yet, what God does is never useless. To see how vital and important Mary's Conception is, *now* and *to us*, we need only answer two questions: Is the Immaculate Conception a living reality today? Secondly, if so, does it have an effect on us, on our lives?

First then, is the Immaculate Conception anything real now? There are two ways of looking at this privilege. From a negative point of view it is, and is called, a preservation from original sin; it is so that we often speak of it, quite rightly. But Mary's holy Conception involves more than an absence of sin. Sin can be expelled from a human person only by that positive reality which is Divine grace. Grace is as real as the temperature, though it is not material. From a positive point of view therefore the Immaculate Conception names in Mary that Divine grace and Divine love with which God endowed her in that instant in which He created her soul.

Now then what was the quality of that grace, what was its extent? We have the words of the Holy Father, who is the voice of Christ. "On her God showered more love than on all other creatures, and so with her alone He was pleased with a most loving complacency. He therefore filled her, far more than all the angelic spirits and all the saints with an abundance

of heavenly gifts in such a wonderful manner that . . . all beautiful and perfect, she might display such fulness of innocence and holiness that under God none greater is known, and which, God excepted, no one can attain even in thought."³⁵ And later the same Pontiff wrote "It is the clear . . . teaching of the Fathers that the most glorious Virgin . . . was resplendent with such a force of heavenly gifts, with such a fulness of grace and with such innocence that she is an ineffable miracle of God . . . and that she approaches as near to God Himself as possible, considering that she has only a created nature, so that she is above all human and angelic praise."³⁶ Theologians teach that these words are to be understood precisely of the grace of the Immaculate Conception.

What then was the Immaculate Conception in Mary? It was that ensemble of Divine grace and virtues which made her so sublime, so holy that she is above all saints and all angels, closer to God than any other creature can ever imagine. The Immaculate Conception made Mary, according to sound theological teaching, far holier than all of God's angels and saints even taken together.

Now was the sanctity of Mary's Conception a thing of just an instant? Was it created by God to be instantaneously destroyed? No, Mary's initial grace and virtues—her Immaculate Conception—was with her throughout her life. Sanctity is cast out, expelled only by mortal sin; and never once did Mary commit even the slightest venial sin! We know that Mary grew, hourly, in holiness: but growth in grace, growth in virtue does not mean substantially new grace, or new virtue but rather the intensification of what is already there. So a parent grows, often, to love his child more deeply as that child grows into adulthood. But that growth is not substantially new love, it is substantially the same love made yet more

perfect, yet more intense. So with Our Lady. The grace of God, the love of God infused into her soul at the first instant of her life was never lost, nor diminished, nor destroyed: it simply went on increasing always, growing, intensifying until that moment when at last in climax the full harmony of God's masterpiece pierced the heaven, and Mary looked upon her God.

And now, and forever more the Immaculate Conception is in heaven. Heaven does not destroy the grace and love of God in which God's holy ones die. That very grace, that very love go on eternally. The virtue of charity which God Himself bestowed upon Our Lady as part of the Immaculate Conception: that identical love burns now in Mary's soul. It is hers, always. It shall never pass away, but goes into the endless reaches of God's everlastingness. That is why Our Lady could say to the child at Lourdes, and say with truth and great accuracy "I am the Immaculate Conception." What God made her, she remains forever.

Does the living reality of the Immaculate Conception have meaning or importance to us? Granted that it is forever vital, does it vitally touch our lives?

God's plan for our welfare, for our salvation has two aspects. The first aspect is the passion and death of Christ; at the cost of His Blood, He earned Divine pardon for our sins, and the title to all graces that we need. In God's view there is first the establishment by Christ of a certain treasury of merits (or title to grace); then secondly, the distribution of those graces to all men who are willing to accept them.

Does the grace of Mary's Conception enter into either aspect of God's plan for our salvation? It is inseparable from both!

In Christ's objective work of redemption—His passion and death—Mary is deeply involved, for she is our Coredemptrix.

God might have willed our redemption quite independently of our Blessed Mother. Certainly God did not need her co-operation, for God needs no creature. Yet, in fact, God willed to send His Son among us, willed to receive from that Son the price of our redemption only on condition of Mary's cooperation. Though it need not have been so, factually, it is so.

But whence came Our Lady's willingness to co-offer her Son, whence her internal obedience to the dreadful thing God asked? It came proximately from her Immaculate Conception! For that willingness, that obedience was an act of virtue, most fundamentally an act of love of God and of us. Now the virtue, the love in the soul of Mary when she stood on Calvary was the identical virtue, the same love which went to make up her Immaculate Conception! Our Lady's co-redemptive activity for us, activity accomplished when she stood there mute, at the foot of the Cross, that work is the grace of her Conception at work.

Secondly, from the actual bestowing of graces upon men, now and always, Mary is inseparable. It is Papal teaching that Our Lady is associated in the giving of all graces to all men. This work of Mary has two phases. First no grace comes to us except in answer to Mary's earnest and ever-efficacious plea;³⁷ and, secondly, when God in answer to her prayer wills grace to us, that grace is, mysteriously, given into her hand and comes to us from her. That is why Pope Pius X wrote that Mary is the dispensatrix of all gifts which Christ, by His Blood, earned for us.³⁸ Always then she is our advocate before Christ in pleading; God's minister to us, in bestowing.

Now what accounts for Our Lady's endless eagerness to obtain from God graces for us? And having obtained, to bestow it on us? It is love, her love for us as most dear chil-

dren. But the love in Mary's heart now, the love which underlies and prompts all her care for us is the love which was so resplendent at her Immaculate Conception. Thus that love at work is working out our lives, and all our hopes.

Always God's handiwork is magnificent. But since Mary is, second only to Christ, God's masterpiece, she is magnificent far beyond the realization of any man or all the angels. And the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady is but the beginning of the wonders God wrought in her: it is the first stroke of the Divine Artist, not the finished work. But because it is God's stroke, it lives forever and living gives unto us and to all men hope amidst failure, idealism amidst weakness, and some sharing of God's own strength, even as we fail. In the light of the Immaculate Conception we can know the way to heaven and to greatness when in all things else we are blind; in the love which is the Immaculate Conception we shall find always courage; and one day a sharing in that victory over death and hell which the sinless Conception constitutes.

¹ Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 8 Dec. 1854.

² *I Timothy* 4; 10.

³ Council of Trent session IV, 8 April 1546

⁴ *Genesis* 3, 16-19.

⁵ *Genesis* 3, 15.

⁶ Cf. Ceuppens, F. *De Protoevangelio*, (Rome, 1932); Roschini, *Mariologia* (Rome, 1947), v. 2 p. 76; Merkelbach, *Mariologia*, (Paris, 1939) p. 78.

⁷ Cf. Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 8 Dec. 1854.

⁸ The precise sense in which Mary is "the woman" spoken of in *Genesis* 3,15 has been a subject of considerable discussion. Among Catholic authors today the more common opinion is that, in the literal sense, the verse refers to Mary. cf. May, Rev. Eric, O.F.M. Cap., *The Scriptural*

Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity in Marian Studies, Washington, 1952, vol. 3, pp. 111 and ff.

⁹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 20aa3,4.

¹⁰ Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 8 Dec. 1854.

¹¹ Cf. Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15.

¹² St. Justin; *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, P.G. 6:710-711; Irenaeus; *Contra Haeresses* 1. III P.G. 7:958ff; Tertullian, *De Carne Christi*, 17, P.L. 2:827-828.

¹³ *Carmina Nisibena*, Leipzig, 1866 p. 40.

¹⁴ Enarrat, in Psalm 117 P.L. 15:1599.

¹⁵ *De Natura et Gratia* c. 36n. 42. M.P.L. 44:267. There is some difficulty in determining whether St. Augustine was consistent in his teaching on this point but the better opinion seems to be that he was. Cf. Roschini op. cit. v. 1 pp. 146ff.

¹⁶ *Orat. in Sanctam Mariam* M.P.G. 77:1427.

¹⁷ *De Laudibus Sanctae Mariae* 1, P.G. 65:681.

¹⁸ *Homilia IV* (ante Natale Domini) P.L. 57:235.

¹⁹ Od. 4.

²⁰ *Sermo de Duplici Nativitate Christi* P.L. 65:728.

²¹ *Sermo de Laudibus Mariae* M.P.L. 65:899.

²² *Oratio 2* in SS. *Deiparae Annuntiationem* P.G. 87:3247.

²³ *Epistola Synodica ad Sergium* P.G. 87:3159.

²⁴ *Encomium in B. Virginem* P.G. 86²: 3279; 3282; 3883.

²⁵ *Homilia de Nativitate B. Virginis* P. G. 96: 664-665.

²⁶ Constitution *Cum praeexcelsa* 28 Feb. 1476. cf. Denz. n734. Also Constitution *Grave Nimis* 4 Sept. 1487 cf. Denz. n735.

²⁷ Bull, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, 1 Oct. 1567 proposition 73. cf. Denz. n. 1073.

²⁸ Bull *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum*, 8 Dec. 1661 cf Denz. n1100.

²⁹ *Luke* 1, 35.

³⁰ Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 8 Dec. 1854.

³¹ Bull, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1 Nov. 1950.

³² *Apocalypse* 12, 1.

³³ *Proverbs* 8, 22-31.

³⁴ Bull, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1 Nov. 1950.

³⁵ Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 8 Dec. 1854.

³⁶ Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 8 Dec. 1854.

³⁷ Cf. Leo XIII, Ency. *Octobri mense*, 22 Sept. 1891.

³⁸ Cf. Ency. *Ad diem illum*, 2 Feb. 1904.

OUTLINE

Introduction: The mystery of the Immaculate Conception is a very important doctrine, but there is a danger that it may seem distant from us.

- I. The nature of the Immaculate Conception explained.
- II. The fact of the Immaculate Conception proved by Scripture, Tradition, and papal teaching.
- III. The reason for the Immaculate Conception:
 1. Why God bestowed this privilege upon our Lady.
 2. How this doctrine has meaning for us.

Discussion Questions

1. Show that Mary's Immaculate Conception is not opposed to the universality of Christ's redemption.
2. In what texts of sacred Scripture is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception revealed?
3. Discuss the fittingness of Mary's Immaculate Conception in relation to each of the divine Persons of the Trinity.
4. How is Mary's Immaculate Conception helpful to us?
5. What is the extent of grace possessed by Mary?





MARY'S ASSUMPTION

5

BY

REV. JAMES J. DOYLE, S.J., S.T.D.

I

WHEN the Spanish Catholic painter, El Greco, bodied forth onto canvas his mind's picture of Mary's Assumption, he taxed his genius to portray for us what a person in heavenly glory is like. To portray her Assumption as he did was to coincide with the solemn pronouncement of Pius XII defining Mary's Assumption in these words: "The Immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever Virgin, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." The Pope by the terms "heavenly glory of body and soul" defines the Assumption principally as a state of her body and soul, as a condition of her very being. The idea of place and of movement to a place is not primarily intended. For heaven is, above all, not a place but a state. Reverting to El Greco's picture we note the power and glory which God has put into Mary's body. This is pictured by the

utter ease with which Mary rises upwards, by the lightness of her body, expressed by the fleecy cloud and the crescent moon at her feet, by the suggested assimilation of her body to the bodies of the accompanying angels—an assimilation which portrays movement, agitation, agility. This same lightness of body is further emphasized by the contrast with the bodies of the apostles standing on the earth below around the empty tomb. It is as if the artist would picture to us the complete freedom of her body from any earthly constraint and limitation—as if the body, now made by God completely subject to the soul, responds to the soul's own spiritual urge towards God.

Yet this is not all that El Greco's brush has succeeded in portraying. The Apostles surround an empty tomb, broken open. Broken open, robbed of its prey, this tomb represents the incorruptibility and immortality of Mary's glorified body. Once again, see the power God has bestowed on his Mother—death, the great enemy, the seeming all-conqueror, cannot hold her, never touch her. To borrow St. Paul's words used to describe the similar state of Christ's glorified body, "death shall no longer have power over her."

Finally, El Greco has indicated by the slashes of light that fall across Mary's garments the beauty which causes her glorified body to shine, as, it were, like light. Thus this famous painting portrays for us the four qualities which Catholic teaching has always ascribed to a glorified body. First, subtlety, the complete subjection of the body to the soul. Second, agility, the ability of the body to react with ease and speed to the soul's command. Third, incorruptibility and immortality—the impossibility of suffering and death. Fourth, clarity, the quality which makes the glorified body shine as it were like light. Put these together with the upward, heavenward movement

of Mary's body and you have pictured the meaning of the assumption of her body.

El Greco, in picturing Mary's glorified body as if it were spiritualized, was not inventing. Of course, the glorified body does not and cannot turn into a spirit. Indeed, our Blessed Lord, appearing to his disciples on the first Easter Sunday met precisely this doubt in their minds and this question written on their faces. St. Luke (24:37-40) tells us: "They were startled and panic-stricken, for they thought they saw a spirit. And Jesus said to them: 'Why are you disturbed, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Feel me and see; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.'" So a glorified human body does not turn into a spirit. Mary's glorified body then and now is the perfect, integral, and complete body of a woman enjoying the prime of life. And yet, as we said, the intuition of El Greco was sound in portraying her body as if it were somehow spiritualized. For the great painter was merely trying to express with brush, paint and canvas what St. Paul, centuries before, had expressed in words. Writing to the Corinthians (I Cor. 15:43-44; 53-55) who were concerned over precisely this question: What will our glorified bodies be like? St. Paul answers: "what is sown in corruption rises in incorruption; what is sown in dishonor rises in glory; what is sown in weakness rises in power; what is sown a natural body rises a spiritual body . . . for this corruptible body must put on incorruption, and this mortal body must put on immortality. . . . Then shall come to pass the word that is written: . . . 'O Death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?'" St. Paul, all the time aware of Christ's words to the apostles in the supper-room still speaks of a glorified body as a spiritual body. So El Greco, in trying to picture

Mary's glorified body as somehow spiritualized was well within his rights. Note that in the passage just cited from St. Paul we have enumerated the four qualities of a glorified body mentioned previously.

But Mary's Assumption involves more than the glorification of her body. The solemn words of Pope Pius XII cited above mentioned a glorification of her soul as well. What does this mean? In the language of the catechism it means she received the beatific vision, she now saw God face to face, not, of course with bodily eyes, but with her mind, her intellect. If it is difficult for us to grasp what the glorification of a human body means, how much more difficult, think you, is it to get even a faint glimmering of what the beatific vision means. It is the saturation of mind, will and heart by the Triune God. God shows Himself to our minds now, not by the intermediary of some creature, not darkly, as in a metal mirror, but openly, clearly, immediately. We see Him as He is in Himself, and not according to the similarity He has with His created likenesses, however noble and lovely these may be. On earth, we get a faint idea of His goodness by saying that it is like our mother's or father's goodness. The comparison, while valid and even necessary here below, falls far short of the reality. Suppose we were almost blind, with the power to see light and color only dimly. Suppose, too, a friend tried to give us some idea of the beauty of a purple sunset in the mountains or of a rosy-fingered dawn breaking across the meadows. Suppose, even, that this friend were a most gifted poet, skilled in all the magic of words. How little, after all, would he convey to us of the beauty and splendor which his own eyes beheld. He would have to make us understand his descriptions by comparing the varied color and light to something within our experience. He would say: "It's like this

or that"—something you already have seen with bleary-eyed vision. You would get some idea, but how faint, how far from the reality. So it is with our knowledge of God now—yes, with the knowledge of the greatest saints during their lifetime—compared to the ecstasy and splendor of the immediate vision of God. This ecstasy, this splendor, this rapture of seeing God face to face, the one she loved so well, above all, flooded Mary's soul like the burst of a full dawn—the dawn of a day that was to know no ending, for it was the day of eternity. Can you imagine the surge of love and joy that thrilled Mary's soul, yes, and her whole being to its inmost depths? We say 'ecstasy,' 'rapture,' we think of our own moments of exquisite happiness when we were carried outside ourselves. But we are forced to confess that these experiences pale almost into insignificance compared to the love and joy which pulsed through Mary when, with the vision of her unique beloved, heavenly glory began for her.

This, then, is the principal meaning of the Assumption, of the Pope's words "She was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory." They mean primarily heaven as a state. Secondly, they refer to heaven as a place: she was taken to this place, where her Divine Son was waiting for her. Here we behold another factor in her glorification—reunion with Jesus in the flesh. Now her bodily eyes behold Him, her arms embrace Him and press Him once more to her bosom. The two hearts that always beat as one now beat together in utter, unending bliss.

When we pray the fourth glorious mystery of the rosary, this is the meaning it should have for us. She had, only in incomparably greater measure, all we will have through our own beatific vision and the resurrection of our bodies.

II

Let us pass to the second part of our lecture. Granted that we have the meaning of the Assumption, how do we know that it is all true? Especially, how do we know the truth of the glorification of her body? About that of her soul, no Christian has doubted from the very beginning of the Church. But that of her body, how do we know that is so? It is, of course, known by faith. We do not claim that it is a fact verifiable by mere historical research or testimony. Rather our assent to this truth is based on God's revelation communicated to us through His infallible Church. This is sufficient. Yet some questions still remain. If we turn for a moment to consider these questions, raised by the Pope's solemn act of defining the Assumption on November 1, 1950, we find that they, though primarily the concern of the theologian, nevertheless interest the other members of the Church as well. St. Peter in his first letter (3,15) says: "Be ready always with an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is in you." This exhortation is certainly applicable to our faith also. All of us, theologians and others, depending EQUALLY on the unerring voice of Christ's vicar on earth should be ready with an answer for those who might ask us a reason for this belief of ours in Mary's Assumption, especially her bodily glorification. There are two distinct questions to be answered. We have just said that we know the truth of Mary's bodily Assumption because the Pope, who is infallible in such matters, has solemnly declared it to be a truth revealed by God. The first question, then, is: how could the Pope arrive at the conclusion that this was a revealed truth? In the document containing the definition the Pope gives us briefly the essential reasons on which this conclusion is based. On

May 1, 1946 he had sent an official letter to all the bishops of the world asking them two questions: whether they judged that the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin could be proposed and defined as a dogma of faith; and whether they and their people desired such a definition. The almost unanimous response of the bishops throughout the world to both questions was yes. Now the Pope could rightly conclude from this almost universal agreement of the ordinary doctrinal authority in the Church together with the concordant faith of the Catholic people: that Mary's bodily Assumption was a truth revealed by Christ to His Spouse, the Church, to be preserved faithfully and taught and interpreted infallibly. Why does this follow? Because, if the whole teaching body of the Church and the whole body of the faithful in dependence upon it were in error on such a point, that is, were believing some truth to be revealed by God which was not, then the Holy Spirit would have deserted the infallible teaching authority of the Church and thus have deserted us who are taught and ruled by that authority. Christ's words, those solemn words addressed to the Apostles and their successors forever: (Matt. 28,18ff), "Go ye and teach all nations whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world," would be proven false and illusory. The Church, believing something to be revelation when it was not, would be no longer in St. Paul's words, "The pillar and ground of the truth," but a society of error. We would indeed, be the most miserable of men. For Christ in uttering those words to the Apostles and their successors, and in saying to Peter and his successors (Matt. 16,18), "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," was promising to them the Spirit of Truth to help them teach His doctrine, His

revelation. Certainly, then, He did not promise this assistance of the Holy Spirit to enable the Pope and Bishops to propose errors or to propound new revelations. This latter point is one which will bear emphasis here: the definition of Mary's Assumption is not a new revelation, for public revelation closed with the death of the last Apostle, St. John. The Assumption is, indeed, the proposal by the Church of a revelation not formerly proposed. And the infallible Church can from time to time propose such truths; they are not new revelations, but the explicit proposal of a revealed truth which formerly was not explicitly proposed for our belief. I say an explicit presentation to denote the fact that the Church may for a long time present a revealed truth for our belief only implicitly, that is, as contained in one or several other truths proposed explicitly. The truth implicitly proposed and implicitly believed is like an underground river whose existence no one suspects until it gushes forth at some spot to betray its presence. The passage of a truth implicitly proposed and believed formerly, to the state of explicit proposal and acceptance is instanced in Mary's bodily Assumption. Her Immaculate Conception is also a case in point. Thus we see that we may not equate the explicit proposal of a truth proposed formerly only implicitly, with a new revelation. To do so would be a lamentable confusion.

The comparison used of the underground river might prove misleading. As if, all of a sudden, the knowledge of Mary's bodily Assumption passed from the state of implicit proposal and belief to that of explicit proposal and belief. No! Rather let us understand the comparison in this way: just as the underground river might first betray its presence by an increased dampness of the ground above it, then farther on in its course by pools of water, and finally by a full uprushing

of its cool, crystal clear waters, so the certainty of the whole Church that Mary's Assumption was a revealed truth grew until it was believed explicitly as a revealed truth.

We can note the first beginnings of this development in the Mass of the feast of Our Blessed Lady's Dormition, as it was called. This was celebrated quite widely in the Church by the years 620-630. Prior to that date, sometime late in the sixth century, the Byzantine Emperor Maurice (582-602) had decreed the celebration of a full-fledged feast towards the end of the sixth century and this argues to some period of preparation for such a solemnity. If, for this and other reasons, we place the beginnings of this feast of Mary's Dormition sometime after the beginning of the sixth century, we see how ancient this belief is. Now I hear someone saying to me: you speak of a feast of Mary's Falling Asleep. All that proves is the celebration of the entrance of her soul into glory; it says nothing of the glorification of her body. Such an objection is well-taken. If, however, we notice the sermons preached by the bishops and priests on the occasion of this feast—and the full text of many of these is extant today—we note that her Falling Asleep has for them a unique character, marking it off clearly from the passages of the saints into heavenly glory. First, the preachers always insist on Mary's Divine Motherhood and her perpetual virginity in this connection. Soon, in St. Germanus of Constantinople (d.733), St. Andrew of Crete (740), St. John Damascene (749), over and above the praises heaped upon Mary for the glorification of her soul, we meet such passages as the following; from a sermon of St. John Damascene: "O admirable passing, which gives admission to the presence of God. For, although, this presence be granted to all the servants filled with the spirit of God... there is, however, an infinite difference between the servants of God

and his mother. . . . If in the natural course of events her holy and blessed soul is separated from her venerable and spotless body, and if her body has been consigned to the grave . . . still it will not remain in death and will not be the prey of corruption." St. Germanus: "Since he who humbled himself in her was God from the beginning and was life before all ages, it was right that the mother of Life should be associated with life; her death should be only a sleep and her removal an awakening." Again: "No, death will not boast of you, because you have carried Life in your womb." After the seventh century the evidence becomes overwhelming.

All these testimonies come from the Eastern Catholic Church. Let us choose just one, but a more important, a most transcendent one, from the Latin Church. St. Sergius I, Pope from 687-701, prescribed processions for the four feasts of Mary celebrated at Rome: her Purification, her Annunciation, her Falling Asleep, and Her Nativity. The prayer said at the church where the people gathered just before the procession was called the collect (*ad collectam*). The collect in use already before Sergius' time (687) for the feast of Mary's Falling Asleep was one in which theologians rightly see the assertion of her bodily Assumption: "Venerable to us, O Lord, is the festivity of this day, on which the Holy Mother of God underwent temporal death, but nevertheless could not be held down by the bonds of death, since, in generating Thy Son, Our Lord, she gave him flesh from her flesh." (Allusion to Acts 2: 24—death cannot hold down.)

Let these citations suffice to mark the beginnings of that explicit faith which day by day becoming clearer, surer, firmer, gave us finally what is today our cherished possession—the Pope's solemn definition of Mary's Assumption. Or to revert to our comparison of the underground river, we might say:

these passages from the Catholic preachers of the Oriental Church and from the Roman liturgy are the first manifestations of the presence of that underground river, that implicit proposal and belief, that was to go on through the ages until it became fully manifest in our own mid-twentieth century. The comparison, at this point, is more apt than might appear at first sight. For just as the underground stream, though the general direction of its flow is steadily onwards in one direction, still meets checks and obstacles, seems even stopped for a time, only to flow over and around these obstacles, so also the movement of the doctrine of Mary's bodily Assumption is steadily onwards in one direction despite vicissitudes. It is, however, only from the vantage point of the response of the bishops to the Pope's letter, and especially from the vantage point of the solemn definition that we can make this assertion. It would, indeed, be to distort history for us to say that the doctrine met with no opposition, even within the Church, once it had begun to exist in the explicit consciousness of the faithful. Opposition may be too strong a word. Certainly, there were those who stood aloof, who harbored a sceptical or, at least, reserved, attitude. The chief difficulty seems to have been that this wonderful doctrine had no foundation either in Scripture or in early written records, or that it might be based on the apocryphal accounts of Mary's death and burial. But the great doctors and theologians along with the bishops and Popes always supported this doctrine both by their skill in argumentation and by their erudition. Merely to mention their names is a roll call of our "greats" through the centuries. St. Anthony of Padua, St. Bonaventure, St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Robert Bellarmine, St. Peter Canisius, St. Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus Liguori and Francis Suarez. The last named asserted, even before

1617, that the doctrine of Mary's Assumption could be defined as a revealed truth.

Before we go on, let us pause and get our bearings. The three parts of this discourse are: 1) what does Mary's Assumption mean; 2) how do we know it is true; 3) what does it mean to us? We are at present engaged in answering the second question: how do we know it is true? Recall with me the course of our discussion on this point so far: we know the truth of the Assumption by our faith which is proposed to us by the infallible definition of the Pope. How did the Pope know that the bodily Assumption of Mary was a revealed truth? Because, in questioning the bishops as to whether they thought the matter could be defined as a truth revealed by God and whether they and their flocks so desired, the answer was a unanimous yes. Given this situation, if the Assumption were not a divinely revealed truth, then the whole Church, pastors and flock, would be in error in things about which Christ had promised absolute immunity from error through the constant assistance and guidance of the Holy Spirit, pledged to Peter and the Apostles and to their successors forever. So, we concluded, the Assumption is a Divinely revealed truth. We warned, however, that it need not be explicitly revealed or explicitly in the consciousness of the Church from the beginning. Implicit revelation was sufficient. Later explicit proposal and belief could follow—it could be like the underground river.

Finally, after noting that this implicit faith could become explicit gradually, we sketched the gradual process from its first beginnings in the Oriental preachers like St. John Damascene, and in the Roman liturgy from before the time of Pope St. Sergius through the great bishops, doctors and theologians

of the Church and in the manifestations of the piety and devotion of the faithful down to the definition of Pius XII.

But still an important question remains to be answered: if we say that Mary's Assumption is revealed implicitly, that is, as contained in other truths which are explicitly revealed, what are these explicitly revealed truths in which God implicitly revealed the Assumption? This question brings us back to Sacred Scripture and the early centuries of the Church.

In Sacred Scripture we find Our Blessed Mother revealed as most constantly and intimately associated with her Divine Son. Christ, says St. Paul, is the second Adam, and, since the very early years of the second century Christian thought has explicitly mentioned Mary as the second or new Eve. She is just as closely associated with the New Adam in His work of repairing the ruin caused by the old Adam as Eve was associated with the old Adam in causing our ruin. In the book of Genesis (3,15), a passage which is justly styled the Proto-evangel or First Gospel, we find Mary intimately joined with Christ. Recall the scene of Genesis. Just after the fall of Adam and Eve through the temptation of the devil, a fall which involved each one of us, God curses the serpent which is a symbol of the devil, in these awesome words: "I will place enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He (that is, her seed, according to the Hebrew text) will crush your head and you shall wound him in the heel." Now, because Our Latin Vulgate translated these latter words so as to refer them to the woman; that is, she shall crush your head and you shall lie in wait for her heel, our Catholic artists have found inspiration here for depicting Mary's Immaculate Conception. The Hebrew text refers the words, however, not to the woman but to her seed, her offspring. But indirectly the words are referred to the woman

also, and hence our artists are justified even on the basis of the Hebrew text. Returning now to the first part of the text, we hear God establishing enmity between the devil and the woman. The seed of the woman is Christ, the Redeemer, and the woman is Mary. Now because of the parallelism in this fifteenth verse, the enmity between Satan and the woman is parallel and similar to the enmity between Christ and Satan. Now this latter enmity is absolute. Christ has no part with Satan in any way; as Redeemer He will crush his head. In what does the redemption consist? In freeing us from sin, certainly. But in freeing us from death also. Hence, from this text of Genesis we may conclude that the woman Mary is associated with Christ just as intimately in His victory as in His enmity; she shares in that victory over sin and death. Hence, in, through, and with her Son she knows not the corruption of the grave. This freedom from the corruption of the grave is her bodily Assumption. To give this argument all its weight we should note that in St. Paul especially, death as well as sin is the enemy to be overcome by the Redeemer. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" he tells the Corinthians (I. 15,24). For death in the present order of Providence is the consequence of sin: "By one man sin came into the world and by sin death."

Recall the text we cited earlier from the first letter to the Corinthians (15,54): "... this mortal body must put on immortality. Then shall come to pass the word that is written: 'O death where is thy victory? O death where is thy sting?'" Note how explicitly he joins sin and death; how the incorruption and immortality of the resurrected body described with such emphasis throughout this passage represents the complete victory over sin and its consequence, death. The perspective, then, of Holy Scripture is this: Christ the Redeemer

conquers Satan by conquering sin and its consequence, death—both brought into the world by Satan, as the first book of the Bible bears witness. By His resurrection, gaining an immortal body, Christ conquers death. But Mary, according to Sacred Scripture is closely associated with Christ. She is full of grace; she is ever Virgin; she is the Mother of Christ, Mother of God; a mother without the pangs of childbirth, for these were the punishment inflicted on Eve for her part in the first sin. She is blessed amongst women (Lk. 1,42). Can we assert all this and still deny her Assumption? If Christ applied the fruits of the redemption to her soul in a most singular and privileged way through her Immaculate Conception, why deny he did the same for her body at the end of her earthly life? Can she who conceived Christ, God Himself, in her womb, who nursed Him at her breasts, whose hands and feet labored for Him, who clasped Him to her bosom, can she be in heaven in soul while her body rots in an unknown grave? Hear St. Robert Bellarmine exclaim: "And who, I ask, could believe that the ark of holiness, the dwelling place of the Word of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, could be reduced to ruin? My soul is filled with horror at the thought that the virginal flesh which has begotten God, had brought Him into the world, had nourished Him and cared for Him, could turn into ashes or given over to be the food of worms." This cry of St. Robert Bellarmine has been the spontaneous cry of the Catholic heart throughout the ages, since the sixth century.

With this we complete our answer to the question: in what truths explicitly revealed is the Assumption implicitly revealed? The answer: In Mary's intimate, ineffably close association with the Redeemer in his victory over sin and death. This association, expressed clearly already in the second century by calling Mary the New Eve, includes the revealed truths

of her Divine Motherhood, her perpetual virginity, her fulness of grace, her blessedness amongst women.

Let us turn now to the third part of tonight's lecture: what does Mary's Assumption mean to us? Here our riches embarrass us, and nothing is wanting except time to detail them in their fulness. There is a peculiar timeliness in the Pope's definition of Mary's Assumption.

First of all, the Assumption means the greater glory of God, of Christ, Mary's Son. For as we saw in the beginning, Mary was assumed by the power of God, a power which God put into Mary's body and a glory he put into her soul. God thus manifests to us His goodness and strength, shows us how wonderful He is, and thus filling us with joy makes us repeat Mary's own beautiful and immortal words: "My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he that is mighty has done great things to me and holy is his name . . . He hath shown the power of his right arm . . . his mercy is from generation to generation to those that fear him. . . ." Can we not, as children of such a Mother, see and glorify God in this wonderful work his power has wrought? Can we not praise the Holy Trinity for the grace bestowed on her who is the Daughter of the eternal Father, the Mother of the eternal Son, and the Spouse of the Holy Spirit? If we do this, then her Assumption glorifies God.

Secondly, her Assumption should mean for us an increase of filial love and devotedness to her, our heavenly Mother. She is truly our Mother, endowed by God with a Mother's heart, a Mother's love for all of us. Given her bodily Assumption, it becomes easier for our minds, wedded to our senses as they are, to turn to her, to imagine her even in her heavenly home, and to desire to see her with our bodily eyes. Further, every genuine child rejoices in his mother's happiness

and good fortune. Mary, our Mother, invites us to share her joy, to congratulate her on God's great gift to her. Since she is so completely our Mother by God's wonderful gift to us, all she is, all she has, is ours, is for us. So, her Assumption, too is meant to draw us closer to her, to make us trust more in her, in her power before God. If God intends to glorify her by such a privilege, what graces will he not grant through her intercession?

Thirdly, Mary's Assumption is not a grace bestowed on her by God but a reward for her earthly life of toil and suffering in union with her Divine Son. Next to Christ, who suffered as she, the queen of martyrs? Whose heart was pierced by a sword of sorrow? Who died a thousand times over because she could not die with her Son? Whose flesh first felt the cruel lash of the whips, the piercing of the thorns, the bite of the nails? Whose soul, during Christ's public life, was saturated with the taunts, the jeers, the mockery, the blasphemy of his enemies? In short, who, next to Christ, toiled so to save souls and thus bring glory to God? Was it not Mary? What reward, then, ought she have received? Ought not we, in our turn, learn the lesson, the secret of Mary's life? Is not her secret her simple "Be it done unto me according to thy word?" Yes, God shows us, by the reward He gives Mary, how He evaluates human life. In His eyes that life is great, that life deserves the richest reward which is most devoted to fulfilling His holy will. God grant us—grant the whole world—this much needed grace, this deep conviction.

Fourthly, and here, perhaps, the timeliness of the Holy Father's definition of this truth stands most fully revealed—the Assumption is one more triumphant answer to the materialism that parades openly in the world today. Materialism is Protean in form, but all its forms and especially that form

called Dialectical Materialism which is the fundamental dogma of Communism, agree in this: man is a mere animal, with no immortal soul, with a body destined to rot and disintegrate and never to rise from the dead. To quote a prophet of this religion of materialism: "Omnipotent matter rolls relentlessly on its way."

Given such a wide-spread doctrine, what else follows but a corruption of morals? For, if I am only an animal, why should I behave as if I had an immortal soul? If death ends all, why fear punishment in the next life? If only matter exists, why indulge in fanciful notions about truth, beauty and goodness, why let them fill my life with vain, agonized longings and strivings, since they have no more value than the dreams of an opium smoker, no more reality than a will o' the wisp? All that is noble and fine is illusory. How can men live under such teaching. No wonder they despair. But the doctrine of Mary's Assumption comes as the dawn of a new hope to a world bitter and disillusioned by its materialism. The words of Pope Pius, ringing clear, as he asserts Mary's Assumption, come like a clarion call to summon men to believe once more in truth, beauty and goodness, to believe that there is another life where the deepest and fondest dreams of human hearts can come true.

Finally, for us Catholics especially, Mary's bodily Assumption into heavenly glory strengthens our belief and hope in our own bodily resurrection. Surely, it was a grace God gave us when the Pope defined this doctrine. No doubt, we had our faith based on Christ's word, and on His glorious Resurrection. But God who knows the stuff of which we are made, knows well what a help it is to our faith and hope to realize that one who is wholly a creature is in heaven body and soul today. Again, in an age when falsity, sometimes disguising

itself under the name of science, scoffs at the very idea of a resurrection, when, therefore, our faith and hope are sorely tried—for we cannot completely escape the influence of the spirit of our times—at such a time, I say, God comes to our aid. He shows us what He can do. Further, a strengthened faith and hope in our resurrection will make it easier for us to put into practice the high requirements of a follower of Christ. Often we are asked to make great sacrifices in living up to Christ's ideals in civil, social, professional, and married life. A faith and hope in our own resurrection, strengthened by the definition of Mary's Assumption, can make these sacrifices easier for us. For Mary assumed into heaven beckons like a star as she sends the benign beams of her strong, pure, sweet loveliness down into this storm-tossed, weary world, beckons men to see and realize what God has prepared for those that love him.

The Secret prayer in the new Mass of the Assumption seems to provide a fitting close for this paper. "May the offering of our devotion ascend to you, O Lord, and through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary assumed into heaven, may the aspirations of our hearts on fire with love be always directed towards you. Amen."

OUTLINE

Introduction: The painting of El Greco typifies the Assumption.

- I. The doctrine of the Assumption means that Mary was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory.
- II. We know the doctrine of the Assumption is true because it is guaranteed by the infallible teaching authority of the Church and found implicitly in divine revelation.
- III. The mystery of the Assumption means the greater glory of God, an increased love on our part for our heavenly mother, a fitting reward to herself, and an answer to modern materialism.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the four qualities of glorified bodies? What can we assume life will be like in heaven?
2. Show that the doctrine of the Assumption is not a new revelation.
3. In what texts of sacred Scripture is the Assumption implicitly revealed?
4. How is Mary's Assumption the answer to modern materialism?





MARY, CO-REDEMPTRIX 6

BY

REV. JUNIPER B. CAROL, O.F.M., S.T.D.

IN this series of lectures, you have had an opportunity to ponder over such singular prerogatives as the divine Motherhood, the perpetual Virginity, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. These are, of course, the four great privileges of Our Blessed Lady, the four fundamental truths which, on the infallible authority of the Church, we know to have been revealed by God concerning her. And yet, the splendor of these four truths, magnificent though it is, does not reflect the full glory of God's Immaculate Mother. These privileges of Our Lady, wonderful though they are, do not give us a complete picture of her unique grandeur, nor do they necessarily portray her in a direct relationship to the individual members of the human family. The prerogative which brings Our Lady into closest and most vital contact with us would seem to be her spiritual Motherhood. It is precisely because Mary is our true Mother in the order of grace, that you and I are so inescapably bound to her, so eternally indebted to her. And how did Our Lady become our true spiritual Mother?

By cooperating with the Savior in the act of bringing the fallen race back to the life of grace on Calvary; in a word: by co-redeeming us. Hence it is obvious that these two consoling truths, namely, the spiritual Maternity and the Co-redemption, stand and fall together. In the present order of things, Our Lady could not possibly become our true Mother without co-redeeming us; nor could she co-redeem us without thereby automatically becoming our Mother. It is to this enthralling phase of Mariology that I should like to draw your attention this evening. I will explain briefly: a) the meaning of Mary's Co-redemption, and b) the grounds on which this doctrine rests. Since these talks are addressed to the general public and not to professional theologians, I will endeavor to avoid abstruse related questions and unnecessary technicalities.

I. THE MEANING OF MARY'S CO-REDEMPTION

When we style Our Lady "Coredeмпtrix" of mankind we simply mean that she cooperated with Christ in effecting our Redemption, in bringing about the reconciliation of the human race with God. This work of Redemption was wrought by Our Divine Savior on Calvary when He offered to His Eternal Father all the merits and satisfactions of His earthly life in order to atone for our sins and regain for us the divine friendship which we had lost. This offering of Christ's merits and satisfactions was made, as we know from Sacred Scripture, in the form of a bloody sacrifice culminating in the death of the Savior on the Cross. Since that sacrificial act of Christ was endowed with an infinite value, and since it was accomplished according to a pre-established plan of God, it stands to reason that God owed it both to Christ and to Himself to accept it for the purpose for which it was offered. Hence,

when Christ died on the Cross, the Eternal Father was so infinitely pleased with His Son's sacrifice, that He automatically cancelled the debt contracted by our sins and showed Himself ready to receive us again into His former friendship. It was then and there that our Redemption properly so called was accomplished, finished, completed. Of course, the treasure of Divine grace which Christ earned for us through His redemptive act, must be made available to us as individuals so that we may become partakers of the Divine life and thus be able to reach our destiny in heaven. But we must bear in mind that this latter process by which the graces of Redemption are communicated to us individually is not the Redemption itself, it is not the Redemption understood in its proper sense, but rather its application to us.

Turning now to Our Lady, when we refer to her as "Co-redemptrix" we have, in mind her cooperation with Christ in the Redemption itself, in the Redemption properly so called, in the Redemption which her Son brought to a close two thousand years ago on Calvary. To be sure, Our Lady is also the dispenser of all graces; she has a positive share in the continuous process of communicating to us the graces earned on Calvary. But the latter function is not the Co-redemption itself, but rather a sequel, a result, an effect of her previous role as Co-redemptrix. This phase of the question deserves stressing because it happens not infrequently that some of our own Catholic writers—with the best of intentions, no doubt, but without sufficient theological reflection—are guilty of inaccurate statements in this respect and create unnecessary confusion in the minds of their readers.

We have, then, that Our Lady cooperated with Christ in the Redemption itself, and not merely in its actual application to mankind. The question now arises: in what specific

way did this cooperation take place? Before answering that question we must recall briefly the various ways in which a person may cooperate in the action of another. In general, a cooperation is called "proximate" if the action of the cooperator directly attains to the ultimate effect produced by the principal agent. It is called "remote" if it merely precedes that effect or leads to it by being the cause of the proximate cause. Either of these cooperations may be formal or material. It is formal if the effect is foreseen and willed by the cooperator; otherwise it is material. Thus, for example, if a doctor takes a poisonous mixture (which had been prepared by the druggist for medicinal purposes) and uses it to kill a patient while his nurse knowingly and willingly helps him to administer the poison, the nurse's cooperation in the doctor's crime is both proximate and formal, while the druggist's cooperation is merely remote and material. However, if the druggist, knowing their evil purpose, intentionally prepared the poisonous mixture, then his cooperation would be remote but formal. It is obvious that in this case the three agents—the druggist, the doctor and the nurse—would be guilty of murder, even though they did not all have exactly the same share in the crime.

I have chosen an example of cooperation in another's evil action because it is easily understood by all. Actually, the principles and distinctions involved are equally valid whether the action performed be good or sinful. Applying now these notions to the specific case of Our Lady, we say that she cooperated in bringing about our Redemption in a twofold way: remotely (and formally), for example, by knowingly and willingly becoming the Mother of the world's Redeemer as Redeemer; proximately, by joining her merits and satisfactions to those of the Savior and having them accepted by the Eternal Father for the self-same purpose, namely, the re-establish-

ment of the broken friendship between God and the human race.

It is only fair to point out in this connection that some few Catholic theologians still hesitate to ascribe this second type of cooperation to Our Blessed Lady. They have no difficulty in admitting her "remote-formal" cooperation; but they hold that Mary's merits and satisfactions were accepted by God, not to bring about the Redemption itself, but rather to make the effects of that Redemption (wrought by Christ alone) available to the individual members of the human family during the course of time. On the other hand, most Catholic theologians believe that Our Lady's merits and satisfactions were endowed with true redemptive value and were accepted by God for the Redemption itself. Hence, they teach that the world was redeemed by Christ and co-redeemed by Mary in the true and proper sense of the word. The difference between the two lies in this, that while Christ's merits and satisfactions (the "price" He paid for our ransom) were endowed with a self-sufficient and infinite value, those of Our Lady were only finite and drew all their redemptive value from the superabundant efficacy of the price paid by the Savior. This being so, Our Lady has a right to be called "Co-redemptrix" of the human race, not only in a broad and loose sense, but also in a strict sense, although, of course, always with and under Christ, Who remains our only principal, infinite and absolutely independent Savior and Redeemer.

II. THE BASIS OF THE DOCTRINE

Having briefly analyzed the exact meaning of Our Lady's role as Co-redemptrix, let us now turn our attention to the various reasons on which we base our belief in this Marian prerogative. The most important may be reduced to the fol-

lowing three: a) the teaching of the Popes; b) the teaching of Sacred Scripture; and c) the teaching of Tradition. In view of the limited time at our disposal, only a condensation of the available testimony may be attempted here.

1. The Teaching of the Popes.

With but few exceptions, the Popes of past centuries seem to have paid no special attention (at least in their public utterances) to Our Lady's function as Co-redemptrix. It is only in recent times, particularly since the definition of the Immaculate Conception a hundred years ago, that they have manifested an ever-increasing interest in this phase of Marian theology. Thus, for example, Pope Leo XIII wrote in 1894 that Mary was "a co-worker with Christ in the latter's expiation or atonement for mankind"; that at the foot of the Cross "she offered up her Son to the divine Justice, dying with Him in her heart."¹ Elsewhere he alludes to the "unique merits with which she became a partaker, a sharer, with Christ in the work of man's Redemption."² Only three years later Saint Pius X stated that Our Lady "being called by Christ to co-operate in the process of human salvation, merits for us out of fittingness, as they say, that which Christ merited in strict justice."³ A few lines before, he had styled Mary "the Reparatrix of fallen mankind," indicating that, in some way, she, too, atoned for the sins of the world.

As to Pope Benedict XV, the following striking quotation speaks for itself: "To such extent did (Mary) suffer and almost die with her suffering and dying Son; and to such extent did she surrender her maternal rights over her Son for man's salvation, and (insofar as she could) immolated Him in order to appease the justice of God, that we may rightly say that she redeemed the human race together with Christ."⁴

Such explicit and forceful language certainly needs no commentary.

Deserving of mention are likewise the words found in the radio broadcast with which Pope Pius XI solemnly closed the jubilee of our Redemption on April 28, 1935: "O Mother of pity and of mercy who, while thy sweetest Son was bringing about the Redemption of the human race on the altar of the Cross, didst stand next to Him, as a Co-redemptrix, suffering with Him. . . ; preserve in us, we beseech thee, and increase day by day, the precious fruit of His Redemption and thy Compassion." It is of interest to note that this same Pope applied the title "Co-redemptrix" to Mary on at least five other occasions.

Lastly, our gloriously reigning Pontiff, Pope Pius XII, who has so frequently and so unequivocally manifested his interest in promoting the glories of Mary, may be quoted also as echoing the teaching of his predecessors on this subject. Thus, for example, in his encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ he wrote: "It was she (Mary) who, always most intimately associated with her Son, like a New Eve, offered Him up to the Eternal Father, together with the sacrifice of her own maternal rights and love, for all the children of Adam, stained by the latter's shameful fall."⁵ Then in his memorable broadcast to the faithful gathered in Fatima on May 13, 1946, the Holy Father again alluded to this doctrine by recalling that, just as Christ is King of the universe "by right of conquest" (namely, as Redeemer), so Mary is universal Queen also "by right of conquest" (namely, as Co-redemptrix). And he went on to say that, just as Mary had been associated with Christ in the work of man's Redemption, so likewise now she is perpetually associated with Him in the distribution of all the graces which flow from that Redemption. This latter state-

ment of the Holy Father is particularly significant because it shows clearly that Mary's present function as dispenser of all graces is not identical with, but rather a result of, her previous role as Co-redemptrix.

2. The Teaching of Sacred Scripture

It has been frequently remarked that the Bible is extremely sober on Our Lady's prerogatives. On the surface, this is literally true. But that little which we find therein is very precious indeed, for it is pregnant with implications. A good illustration of this is had, for example, in the third chapter of the book of Genesis, verse 15. There we read that, after the fall of our first parents, God addressed the devil (under the appearance of a serpent) with these words: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed. He (the woman's seed) shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for his heel." Some Catholic scholars are of the opinion that this biblical passage contains the whole of Mariology in a nutshell. I believe there is a good deal of truth in that. Let us see what bearing the text has on the present discussion. The woman mentioned in the text is Our Blessed Lady. As recent Popes have pointed out, she is foreshadowed therein as closely sharing the selfsame struggle and victory of her Son over the devil. Now, since it was precisely through the work of our Redemption that Christ crushed and destroyed the power of Satan and reconciled God and man, it follows that Our Lady's intimate cooperation in the Savior's redemptive mission is also implied in this prophecy. Such is, in its barest outline, the argument which may be drawn from Genesis 3.15, in favor of Mary's Co-redemption. There are, of course, other biblical passages which could be discussed here, but the one indicated should suffice.

3. The Teaching of Tradition

By "Tradition" here is meant the body of revealed truths handed down from century to century through the Fathers of the Church and Catholic writers of subsequent ages under the guidance of the Holy Spirit preserving the Church from error. The question now is: does the doctrine of Mary's Co-redemption in any way form part of that body of truths so handed down from the beginning? We believe it does. In order to substantiate this claim, reams of pages would have to be written; and, incidentally, they have been written. Here only a brief summary of the argument can be sketched.

The germ idea of all that we have said in connection with Mary's position as Co-redemptrix is already contained in a title given her from the earliest times, namely, the title of "Second Eve." The striking contrast which the ancient writers established between Mary and Eve dates back to at least the beginning of the second century. In substance, the antithesis implies that just as Eve had cooperated with Adam in the sin which doomed the whole human race, so Mary was chosen by God to cooperate with Christ, the Second Adam, in redeeming mankind from that sin. These early writers tell us that just as Eve was the mother of all the living according to the flesh, so it was God's plan that Mary should be the mother of all the living according to the life of grace. These and many similar statements found in the early Church imply, of course, that our Blessed Lady had been assigned a very definite function in the process of our original reconciliation with God. No doubt, the ancients did not have the same full grasp of the Co-redemption that we have at the present time, but the basic idea was there just the same. It took many centuries of analysis, reflection and thoughtful penetration to discover all the further implications of that germinal notion of

Second Eve. Our 20th century teaching on Mary's Co-redemption is a legitimate development and elaboration of what the early Church taught only implicitly. We have simply carried to its ultimate conclusion the original belief concerning Mary's position in the whole scheme of salvation. To be sure, there is always danger that somewhere in this delicate process of development the original idea may be disfigured, and even totally distorted, due to the frailty of the human mind, but—and here is the all-important thing to remember—so long as we keep the teaching of the Church before our eyes and are ready to conform to that teaching in our speculations, we are on the safe side. The true Catholic scholar searches the Scriptures and investigates the monuments of Tradition, but in so doing he feels that the last word, the final verdict must always come from the living Magisterium, from the infallible teaching authority of the Church. Perhaps some day the Holy Father will make a final and solemn pronouncement in this connection. We sincerely hope so. In the meantime, let us be grateful to God Who, in His infinite love and mercy, has chosen His own Immaculate Mother to be our Mother also and our Co-redemptrix.

¹ Pope Leo XIII. Encyclical *Jucunda semper*. 1894.

² Pope Leo XIII. Encyclical *Parta humano generi*. 1901.

³ Pope Pius X. Encyclical *Ad diem illum*. 1904.

⁴ Pope Benedict XV. Apostolic Letter *Inter sodalicia*. 1918.

⁵ Pope Pius XII. Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*. 1943.

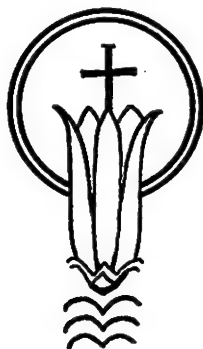
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OUTLINE

Introduction: Four fundamental Marian doctrines are complemented by Mary's spiritual maternity, which is based on the doctrine of co-redemption.

I. The meaning of Co-redemption.

1. Cooperation with Christ in effecting our redemption.
2. The function of dispensing graces is a sequel and is to be distinguished from redemptive cooperation.
3. Distinctions between remote and proximate cooperation applied to Mary's role in the redemption.

II. The basis of the doctrine.

1. Recent Popes, especially Pius XII, have taught this doctrine.
2. The argument from Gen. 3,15.
3. Tradition supports the thesis in the ancient writers' use of the title Second Eve.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the four fundamental Marian truths, and what doctrines flow from them?
2. What is the distinction between remote and proximate cooperation?
3. Explain the connection between Mary's titles of co-redemptrix and dispenser of graces.
4. How is the title Second Eve as used by ancient writers equivalent to co-redemptrix?
5. Why is Gen. 3,15 said to contain the whole of mariology in a nutshell?

7 MARY IN THE LITURGY

BY

REV. OWEN BENNETT, O.F.M. CONV., M.A., PH.D.

I. THE BEGINNINGS OF MARIAN LITURGY—FROM APOSTOLIC TIMES TO THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS¹

THE earliest known liturgical feast in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary was observed in the East in the second half of the fourth century. This is not surprising when we reflect upon the early history of the liturgical calendar in general.

1. Formation and First Development of the Ecclesiastical Calendar.

Easter and Pentecost were the only universal Christian feasts down to the third century, as may be gathered from the testimony of Tertullian (d. 222) and Origen (185-255).² The latter, in his controversy with Celsus, enumerated all the feasts celebrated by the Christians of his time. It is only in the fourth century that we find the feasts of Christmas and Epiphany, the former in the West, the latter in the East.³ At the end of the fourth century the catalogue of feasts contained in the so-

called Constitutions of the Apostles is as follows: Easter, Pentecost, Ascension, Christmas, Epiphany, feasts of the Apostles, of St. Stephen Proto-martyr and other martyrs.⁴

In general, the ecclesiastical calendar began to be formed at the close of the Apostolic age, about the central point of Christ and the mysteries of redemption. From the second century on there began the local cult of the witnesses to Christ, the martyrs, whose anniversaries were celebrated at their tombs on the day of their martyrdom. But it was not until the peace of Constantine that the external manifestations of cult began to assume wider dimensions, e.g. in the construction of shrines and churches, and it was only in the course of the fourth and fifth centuries that the cult of the martyrs was changed gradually from a local observance to the status of a universal thing fixed definitively in the liturgical books accepted by the various churches.⁵

If we keep in mind this slow and gradual development of the calendar of the Church (even with regard to such feasts as Christmas and Epiphany), there will be no need to introduce *a priori* speculations as to why there were no feasts of Our Lady in the first three centuries. It was not because of any imagined danger in bringing into prominence the Mother of God (with converts from polytheism) that we do not find feasts of Our Lady in the first centuries.⁶

2. Our Lady Venerated From Apostolic Times

But if the feasts had not as yet appeared, there was not lacking, from the time of the Apostles, evidence of a great veneration towards Our Lady as Mother of the Savior. The foundation of this veneration is in Holy Scripture itself. In the *Acts of the Apostles* we read that Our Lady was with the Apostles awaiting the sending of the Holy Spirit (*Acts*, I, 14). The Apostolic Fathers (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephes.*,

VII, 2: *Smyrn.*, I, 1) lay emphasis on her divine maternity. In the second century, St. Justin at Rome, St. Irenaeus at Lyons, and Tertullian at Carthage develop the parallel exposed by St. Paul between Adam and Christ by showing an analogous parallel between Eve and Mary.⁷ In the most ancient formula of the Creed recited at the administration of the sacrament of Baptism the greatness of Mary as Virgin and Mother of the Savior is continually recalled to the faithful: *Natum ex Maria Virgine.*⁸

3. Evidence from the Catacombs

Reflecting this veneration of Mary, and testifying also to the utmost trust in her intercession, are the many paintings of the Blessed Mother in the catacombs of Rome dating from the second and third century. The oldest of these paintings yet discovered is in the catacomb or cemetery of Priscilla, the oldest of the Roman cemeteries. This catacomb goes back to the days of the Apostles; Aquila and Prisca, the disciples of St. Paul are buried here.⁹ In the most ancient section of this cemetery there is a chapel, on the wall of which is a painting of the Blessed Virgin which dates from the early second century. In this painting Mary is seated on a throne, her head covered with a veil, and she holds the Child Jesus in her arms, while a figure wearing a pallium stands respectfully before her and points upward to a star shining in the sky above the throne.¹⁰ The figure is generally supposed to be the prophet Isaias; although Schuster prefers the view that the figure represents one of the Magi and that the picture itself represents the adoration of the Magi, a scene constantly depicted in the Christian art of the first four centuries. Schuster points out that the cult of Our Lady is indicated by this: "The painters of those very early days would certainly not have reproduced with such frequency that Gospel scene in which Mary

must necessarily occupy the principal part of the picture, if veneration for her had not from that time been intimately associated with the cultus of her divine Son."¹¹

In the same cemetery of Priscilla there is another painting, dating from the third century, which represents the Blessed Virgin not in a scene from the Bible but explicitly as an object of veneration and imitation. In this painting the veiling of a virgin is depicted—one of those holy women who chose voluntarily to serve God in a life of perfect continence. The bishop, who is represented as officiating at the ceremony, is pointing out to the consecrated virgin, as a model for her imitation, the Virgin Mary who is represented as seated upon a throne with the Child Jesus in her arms.¹²

In the fifth volume of his work, *The Sacramentary*, Schuster gives an account of many other very ancient paintings of the Blessed Mother in a chapter entitled "The Portraits of the Blessed Virgin Mary Venerated at Rome."¹³

In addition to the paintings of Our Lady mention ought also to be made of the "gold glass" representations of her, which are dated not much later than the third century. These were made by fastening gold leaf to glass and then etching a portrait into the gold.¹⁴ In these gold glass representations the Blessed Virgin is shown in the central place between two saints, often between Peter and Paul, as a personage superior to them.¹⁵

4. Evidence of Early Christian Prayers

Explicit evidence that the Blessed Mother was invoked as the most powerful intercessor before God is had in the ancient prayer, called in Latin *Sub tuum praesidium*, and familiar enough in our modern prayer-books: "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious

and blessed Virgin."¹⁶ This prayer, expressing such limitless confidence in the intercession of Our Lady, is found in the Roman, Byzantine, Coptic, and Ambrosian liturgies, and is the oldest known prayer to the Blessed Mother. A recent paleographic find gives us valuable evidence of the great antiquity of this prayer. In 1938, C. H. Roberts published at Manchester, England, a *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library*. In the third volume of this *Catalogue* there is listed a fragment of papyrus from Egypt, on which is incised an almost complete Greek version of the *Sub tuum praesidium*, the missing parts of which can be readily reconstructed from the expressions in the prayer as found in other liturgies. Lobel (followed by Mercenier), on the basis of a paleographic analysis, dates this papyrus as no later than the third century.¹⁷ There is a prayer used in the church of Syria from the earliest times which is very similar in content to the *Sub tuum praesidium*, although the actual formula is not the same. The Syrian prayer runs: "Protect us, O Mother of God, under thy wings, from all dangers: thou art our refuge, our greatest hope; subdue and bring to naught those who injure us because of our sins. To the port of salvation, which thou thyself art, lead us, O most blessed one!"¹⁸

5. Marian Hymns of St. Ephrem

The development of theological thought about the central figure of Christ during the fourth century brought out more and more the essential part played by Our Lady in the plan of Redemption, and at the same time brought out more clearly the recognition of her supreme sanctity among creatures. From the first half of the fourth century there appears in the writings of the Greek theologians the expression, "*Panagia*" (all-holy), describing Mary, an expression which becomes common in Byzantine literature later on.¹⁹ This development of

theological thought finds poetic expression in the beautiful hymns of St. Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373), hymns which may have been composed for the liturgical use of his monks. Pere Jugie has collected from these hymns a number of expressions of the most exalted praise of the sanctity of Mary.²⁰ St. Ephrem addresses the Blessed Mother as "all pure," "all immaculate," "completely without reproach," "all worthy of praise," "all blessed." From one hymn Jugie quotes the following: "The cherubim with their four-fold countenance are not equal to thee in sanctity . . . nor are the legions of angels equal to thee in purity." And from another hymn: "In truth, O Lord, Thou and Thy Mother are the only ones who are beautiful in every way; for in Thee, Lord, there is no taint, nor in Thy Mother the slightest stain."

6. Earliest Liturgical Expressions

The exalted praise of Mary in St. Ephrem's hymns is echoed in the writings of the great Fathers and Doctors of the fourth and fifth centuries: St. Athanasius, St. John Chrysostom, St. Epiphanius, St. Ambrose, St. Jerome and St. Augustine. It is most difficult to determine what was the first liturgical expressions of this development of Marian piety. Perhaps it was in the very heart of the Roman liturgy—in the *Communicantes* of the Mass. Professor Carlo Cecchelli of the University of Rome gives several arguments to show that the prayer may date from as early as the fourth century.²¹

The invocation and praise of Mary in the oriental liturgy also dates from a period perhaps as early as this. Pope Benedict XV, in his encyclical letter *Principi Apostolorum* (October 5, 1920), says that St. Ephrem of Syria was the inspirer of the custom of introducing anthems, canticles, hymns and responses into the liturgy. The greatest number of these were in honor of the Mother of God, the all-holy one.²²

7. Earliest Feast of Our Lady

But the decisive step, of course, was the institution of a liturgical feast in honor of the Blessed Mother. We find such a feast celebrated at Antioch at the end of the fourth century.²³ This feast apparently celebrated no special mystery of the Blessed Virgin but was a feast of a general character in her honor. There was a feast commemorating the meeting of Our Lord with Simeon and Anna which was celebrated at Jerusalem in the fourth century. This feast is mentioned in the famous *Peregrinatio Aetheriae* (or *Silviae*), an account of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land dating from the latter part of the fourth century. But this feast did not become distinctively Marian in character, as the celebration of her Purification, until the sixth century when it was introduced at Constantinople.²⁴

There was also a Marian festival of a general character celebrated at Constantinople before the Council of Ephesus. We have evidence of this in a sermon in praise of Mary preached by St. Proclus at Constantinople in 429, in the presence of the then Patriarch, Nestorius. In the beginning of this sermon Proclus declares: "Brethren, the solemnity of the Virgin today calls forth from my tongue a public testimonial of praise."²⁵ Nestorius protested when Proclus in his sermon defended the traditional usage of the term, 'Theotokos,' to describe the Blessed Virgin. Nestorius, infected with the Christological error of hypostatic dualism, which he had imbibed from Theodore of Mopsuestia, taught that there were two persons in Christ, one divine and one human, and as a consequence denied that Mary could be called with strict theological accuracy 'Theotokos' or 'Mother of God.' The error of Nestorius was condemned, amid the great rejoicing of the people, at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Nestorius was deposed as patri-

arch of Constantinople, and St. Proclus was named as his successor.²⁶

Abbot Cabrol calls attention to the sermons of St. Peter Chrysologus (d. 450) at Ravenna. On the days before Christmas St. Peter used to preach on the history of St. John the Baptist, on the Annunciation and Conception of Mary, and on the birth of the Savior. Cabrol associates this solemnity in connection with Christmas with the feast of Mary celebrated by the Syrian church and at Constantinople on the first or second day after Christmas.²⁷

II. THE POST-EPHESINE DEVELOPMENT—THE FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION

1. Churches Dedicated in Honor of Mary

The Council of Ephesus with its solemn proclamation of the divine maternity was a decisive point in the development of Marian cult. Shortly after this council many churches both in the East and in the West were dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. There was at least one church dedicated to Mary in the East before the council was held—the very church in which the council met. We may read in the Acts of the council that the bishops were assembling "in the church of Ephesus called Mary."²⁸

After the council there were many more. Two churches were dedicated to Our Lady of Palestine in the fifth century, one in Jerusalem at the place indicated as the tomb of the Blessed Virgin, another at Mt. Gazirim, about twenty-five miles north of Jerusalem. The ancient patriarchal church at Alexandria in Egypt, built in the first half of the fourth century, was dedicated to Mary sometime in the fifth century. A basilica was dedicated in her honor at Ravenna in the early sixth century. Professor Cecchelli lists many more, in Syria, Asia Minor,

Egypt, Rome and many other towns of Italy, Africa, Gaul and Spain.²⁹

The most ancient extant catalogue of the churches at Rome is part of a document that dates back to the seventh century. This catalogue lists four churches dedicated to Mary. Among these is the Basilica called St. Mary Major. This church was constructed under Pope Liberius (352-366), and renovated by Pope Sixtus III (432-440), at which time the wonderful mosaics were added depicting scenes from the Old Testament and the life of the Blessed Mother. These mosaics are regarded as a historical monument of the Council of Ephesus.

Before the end of the eight century there was not a city in the East or West which was without a church dedicated in honor of the Mother of God.³⁰

2. Images of the Blessed Mother

With the erection and dedication of so many churches in honor of the Blessed Mother, there entered into use also the cult of her images. One of the most famous of these was that attributed to St. Luke, which was brought from Jerusalem to Constantinople in 451. There were innumerable paintings of the Blessed Mother made after the model of this one supposedly painted by the Evangelist.

Along with the multiplication of churches and images there was also a significant development in her feasts. The pre-Ephesine Marian festival was of a general character. It is in the fifth or early sixth century that the first Marian feast of a more definite character appears in the liturgy. It was first observed, in all likelihood, in the church built over her tomb in Jerusalem. In a panegyric preached in 529 by one Theodore on St. Theodosius, Abbot of the monastery of St. Sabbas, near Jerusalem, mention is made of this feast of the Virgin at which a great multitude assisted.³¹

3. Earliest Particular Feast of Mary

What was the specific character of this festival? Many authorities of the highest repute hold that this feast of the Blessed Mother was that of her Assumption in heaven. These authorities hold that the feast of Our Lady's Assumption was celebrated in the East as early as the closing of the fifth or the opening decades of the sixth century.⁸²

This earliest of Our Lady's particular feasts was not called the "Assumption" in the East. The name "Assumption," is of Roman origin, and it became more and more widely used from the ninth century on to signify the translation of the Blessed Virgin, body and soul, into heaven, (in contradistinction from "Ascension," which signifies the entrance into heaven, by His own divine power, of Jesus risen from the dead). The feast celebrated in the East from the fifth or sixth century commemorated the same mystery, but was named variously *Dormition*, *Deposition*, *Pausatio* or *Transitus*—all names which signify the end of Our Lady's earthly life, and, by implication, her entrance into heaven.⁸³

According to a hymn of James of Sarug, a Syrian bishop of the fifth and sixth century (d. 521), the Syrian Church knew this feast in the early years of the sixth century. The Emperor Maurice (582-602) ordered it to be observed throughout the Byzantine Empire, but by that time it had already spread widely. St. Gregory of Tours (d. 593) mentions (in his *De Gloria Martyrum*) this feast of the Blessed Mother celebrated in Gaul in the middle of the eleventh month.⁸⁴ The Coptic church celebrated a similar feast on January 16th; but it was celebrated by the Byzantines in the middle of the month of August, on a date which was fixed definitely by the above-mentioned decree of the Emperor Maurice.⁸⁵

On the question of the date of the introduction of the

feast of the Assumption at Rome there is some divergence of opinion. Cardinal Schuster thinks it probable that the dedication of St. Mary Major, in the pontificate of Sixtus III, i.e. immediately after the Council of Ephesus, had some connection with the feast of the Assumption.³⁶ But this would require an earlier dating of the feast than is generally admitted. Professor Cecchelli notes that there may be a hint of such a feast in a letter of Pope Leo the Great (440-461).³⁷ Father Antonelli sees Marian elements in some of the Roman Advent liturgy of the sixth century.³⁸ Dom Capelle maintains that recent research forces us to place the introduction of a particular feast of Mary in the Roman liturgy sometime after the death of Gregory the Great (d. 604).³⁹ Dom Marin gives evidence for its introduction at Rome shortly after 650.⁴⁰

4. Feast of Mary at Rome

Whatever the date of its introduction at Rome we are certain that the feast of the Assumption was celebrated there at the beginning of the eighth century, for the Assumption is one of the four feasts for which Pope St. Sergius (687-701) prescribed a stational procession, or litany. The other feasts mentioned were the Nativity of Our Lady, the Annunciation, and Purification.⁴¹

The feast of Our Lady's Nativity was first introduced about the middle of the sixth century, probably after the example of the earlier feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist.⁴²

The first express and indubitable reference to the feast of the Annunciation, as a particular Marian feast, and not a part of the observance of Christmas, is at the 10th Council of Toledo in 656, which refers to the feast as already widely observed. Further indications make it appear quite possible that the feast existed at Ephesus in 500, and in certain monasteries of Palestine before that time.⁴³

Further solemnity was soon added to the feast of the Assumption at Rome. Pope Leo IV (847) ordered it to be preceded by a vigil and followed by an octave. Pope Nicholas I (858) in his letter to the Bulgarians, who had recently embraced the faith, prescribed that they should observe the fast on the Vigil of the Assumption after the example of the Roman Church. The procession on the day of the Assumption became one of the most imposing manifestations of the religious life in Rome.⁴⁴

The Roman example was rapidly followed throughout the West. The feast of the Assumption appears in England as early as 747, and in the reign of King Alfred (871-896) it is of such importance that the whole week before it is regarded as a time free of labor for all. In the *Ordo* of Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury (†1089) the Assumption is the only feast of the first class of all the feasts of the Blessed Virgin. Martyrologies and other documents of the 8th and 9th centuries witness that the feast is celebrated with great solemnity throughout the whole Church.⁴⁵

III. THE MEDIEVAL CULT OF MARY

The account of the development of the feast of the Assumption has carried us over into the medieval period, a golden age of Marian devotion. The scholastic theologians, inquiring profoundly into the divine truths and setting forth in their theological reasoning the harmonious agreement of the various truths of faith, brought out more clearly the theological foundation of the special worship of hyperdulia paid to Mary. The honor paid to Mary, says St. Bonaventure, is called by the theologians "hyperdulia," and is above all other honor paid to saints or angels because Mary as Mother of God is

elevated above all other creatures.⁴⁶ And St. Thomas Aquinas declares that the closer relationship and conformity a creature bears to God the greater is the reverence due such a one. This is the basis, he says, for the special veneration paid the Blessed Virgin, which is the highest of all forms of such worship.⁴⁷

The unique place of Mary in Catholic worship thus explained by the theologians was recognized and manifested by the great medieval flowering of Marian devotional life. Churches without number from the ninth century on are dedicated to Mary, especially cathedrals. Even in those dedicated under some other title there is at least one altar in honor of the Virgin. Mary is the most popular of all baptismal names, more frequently taken than that of the most well-known saints.⁴⁸

1. Medieval Shrines of Mary.

Shrines in Our Lady's honor dot the cities and countryside. Some of these become universally known, like Le Puy-en-Velay in France, Loreto in Italy. With Loreto and its Holy House is associated the famous Litany of the Blessed Mother—the Litany of Loreto.

Loreto became well-known towards the close of the middle ages, but Le Puy was a famous shrine of the Blessed Mother from the dawn of the medieval period. The Emperor Charlemagne made pilgrimages to Le Puy in 772 and 800. This set a precedent which was followed by almost all the French Kings throughout the middle ages. King Louis IX, the Saint, gave to the shrine its famous ebony image of the Blessed Virgin, garbed in gold brocade. Many well-known saints were pilgrims to Le Puy: St. Dominic, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Vincent Ferrer, and a host of others. The Shrine of Our Lady

of Le Puy was the scene of many miracles of healing, and was for centuries among the most important churches in all Christendom, holding a position similar to that of Lourdes today. The hospital of Notre-Dame at Le Puy was supported by offerings and taxes collected in every country of the Christian West. Protected from harm during the religious wars of the 16th century, the statue of Our Lady of Le Puy was torn down from its place and burned in the public square in the Revolution, 1793.⁴⁹

Another medieval shrine, famous in England at least, was that of Our Lady of Walsingham. This shrine of Our Lady, located near the seacoast in eastern Norfolk, about one hundred miles north of London, was founded in the time of King Edward the Confessor (11th century). It was placed in charge of the Augustinian canons in the following century, and became famous as a place of pilgrimage for high and low. Walsingham also was the scene of many miracles. It was visited by almost all the English Kings down to Henry VIII who made a pilgrimage there in 1513, and at whose order twenty-five years later, in 1538, the shrine was despoiled and destroyed.⁵⁰

The arts of sculpture, painting, and working in stained glass, find a theme of endless inspiration in the Virgin-Mother of Jesus. "Art exalted her above all creatures, and conceived her as an eternal thought of God. And the men of the Middle Ages loved the Virgin with a disinterested love—they did not beseech her incessantly for miracles. They conceived of her as a sublime idea, in which the soul and heart may forever discover new wonders."⁵¹

The piety of the great religious orders founded during the middle ages—Cistercians, Premonstratensians, Dominicans, Franciscans, Servites, Carmelites, Mercedarians—is a particu-

larly Marian piety, manifested by the preaching of Marian devotional practices, and also by the many thousands of prose pieces, hymns, and little poems, written by monks and friars.⁵²

In the liturgy proper many new observances in honor of the Blessed Mother make their appearance. The canticle of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the *Magnificat* was already in the divine office as early as the year 500.⁵³ The Preface of the Blessed Virgin was introduced in the Mass in 1095, at the order of Pope Urban II, to seek Our Lady's intercession for the success of the first crusade.⁵⁴

2. Saturdays Dedicated to Mary

The special dedication of every Saturday to Mary is a practice that dates back at least to the tenth century. The practice is already well-known and widely observed in the time of St. Peter Damian (b. 1007). One of St. Peter's contemporaries, Berthold of Constance, said that the practice went back to Alcuin, the English monk who organized the school of Charlemagne about the year 800. The Office de Beata Maria in Sabba-to originated with the Benedictines at Cluny early in the tenth century, and spread throughout the many monasteries of the Order.⁵⁵ St. Anthony of Padua, explaining the reason for this dedication of Saturday to Mary, declares that, according to the view of certain ones (*ut quidem dicunt*), Our Lady did not leave the place where her divine Son was buried, but remained there weeping and keeping watch until His Resurrection. Therefore Saturday is celebrated by the faithful in her honor.⁵⁶

3. Little Office and Rosary

The first beginnings of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary dates from the 10th century. It was the custom of

devout lay people to recite this office every Saturday. The Cistercians and Camaldolese monks adopted the custom of reciting it in common, after the Divine Office. Other communities also followed this practice. Throughout the Middle Ages the Little Office remained the most popular form of devotion to the Blessed Mother.⁵⁷

But a new devotion to Our Lady which appeared in the Middle Ages was to develop into its final form at the end of the medieval period, when it would become the most widely known and widely loved of all popular devotions to Mary—the Rosary. The custom of saying *Paters* and *Aves*, often 150 to correspond with the number of Psalms, and of keeping count of them by means of a string of beads, was fairly widespread as early as the 12th century. The *Aves* consisted simply of the first half of the *Hail Mary* as we know it today. Various endings were added to this invocation, and some time towards the close of the medieval period the second part of the *Hail Mary* became fixed in its present form. It was the friars of the Order of St. Dominic who gave the Rosary the form that it now has, and who above all others have spread this devotion throughout the world. It is not until after the medieval period, however, that the Rosary takes its place as the most widespread of all popular devotions in honor of the Mother of God, especially after the great victories over the Turks at Lepanto (1571) and Vienna (1683), victories attributed not so much to the power of Christian arms, however bravely the followers of Don Juan of Austria and of John Sobieski may have fought, as to the power of the rosary prayers begging the protection and assistance of the Queen of Heaven.⁵⁸

Other medieval devotions in honor of Our Lady which we might mention are the *Salve Regina*, the many hymns and

sequences in her honor including the best-known, the *Stabat Mater*, and the practice of the *Angelus*.

4. *Salve Regina*

The *Salve Regina*, much loved in the middle ages, was in use even before the time of St. Bernard. This Antiphon or Anthem of Our Lady dates from the 10th or 11th century. It is ascribed by some authorities to a Bishop of Le Puy of the 11th century and is sometimes known as the Anthem of Le Puy.⁵⁹ The practice of singing it in the Divine Office was introduced by Peter the Venerable at Cluny in 1135. St. Bernard labored zealously to spread its use in the 12th century. In the 13th century (1221) it was adopted by the Dominicans to be sung after Compline. About the same time it was incorporated, together with the three other Anthems of the Blessed Virgin Mary, into the new modernized Breviary of the Franciscans, and thence was taken over into the Roman Breviary. Ever since 1251 (with the omission of a period about the 15th century) the singing of the *Salve Regina* (after Compline) is the last exercise of the day in Cistercian monasteries. The Carmelites recite the *Salve Regina* in every hour of the Divine Office. Pope Leo XIII ordered it to be said for the needs of the Church after every low Mass. Pope Pius XI, directed that the *Salve Regina* and other prayers after Mass be said for the conversion of Russia.⁶⁰ The *Stabat Mater* is sometimes ascribed to the Franciscan poet-mystic, Jacopone da Todi, although Msgr. H. T. Henry (in *Cath. Encl.*) says that Pope Innocent III (1216) is the most probable of all candidates proposed as its author. The practice of saying the *Angelus* in the morning began in the 13th century, with the object of commemorating the Incarnation. The mid-day *Angelus* was added in the 15th century when Pope Callistus III prescribed it as a prayer against the Turkish peril. The third

recitation of the *Angelus*, in the evening, began to be observed in the 16th century.

5. New Marian Feasts

The medieval period also saw the introduction of many new feasts in honor of the Mother of God. The *Feast of Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, (November 21), which began in the East at the time of the Emperor Justinian in 543, as the anniversary of the dedication of the new Church of Our Lady in Jerusalem, was introduced in the West in the 11th century, celebrated at the Papal Court at Avignon in 1373 and adopted little by little throughout the West. The Feast of the Visitation, (July 2), was introduced, also from the East, by the Franciscans in 1263, and was made a universal feast in 1389. Various religious orders observed particular feasts in honor of Mary which were later adopted by the Universal Church. The Servites celebrated the *Feast of the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady* which has since come into the calendar on the Friday after Passion Sunday. The Carmelites had the *Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel* (July 16), and Mercedarians had their *Feast of Our Lady of Mercy* or as it is also known in English *Our Lady of Ransom* (September 24).

But above all other feasts instituted in the West in the Medieval period it is the feast celebrating *Our Lady's Conception* that must draw our special attention, for it is this feast, together with that of Our Lady's Assumption, which is at the very heart of the development of Marian devotion and cult throughout the whole modern period down to our own day. This feast appeared in the West in the early Middle Ages, but again it is to the East that we must go to discover its origins.

IV. THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AND THE MODERN AGE

1. Eastern Origins of the Feast of Our Lady's Conception

The Eastern origins of the liturgical celebration of the Immaculate Conception are to be found in a Byzantine feast called sometimes the *Conception of St. Anne* and sometime also the *Conception of Mary*. This feast, introduced in connection with the already existing feast of Our Lady's Nativity, was celebrated at least as early as the late seventh or early eighth century. We have evidence of this in the writings of St. Andrew of Crete (d. 740). St. Andrew was famous both as a preacher, and as a melode, or sacred poet. Among his poetical works on the Blessed Virgin are two *canons*, i.e. liturgical offices to be sung in her honor. One of these is for the feast of the Conception of St. Anne, the grandmother of the Lord, and it opens with the lines: "We celebrate today thy conception, O pious Anne, because delivered from the bonds of sterility, thou hast conceived her who has contained Him Who is in no way contained."⁶¹ We also possess a homily on this feast by John, Bishop of Euboea, a contemporary of St. Andrew of Crete, in which the preacher declares: "The first of all the great feasts is that on which Joachim and Anne received the announcement of the birth of the All-Immaculate Mary, Mother of God."⁶² The feast is mentioned in many menologies (liturgical calendars) and other liturgical documents from the eighth century on, and by the time of Photius (820-897) it was a feast universally observed in the Byzantine Empire. Perhaps from this time, and certainly later on, (by the twelfth century), it was a holiday as well.⁶³ The feast was celebrated in Byzantine Italy, at Naples, in the ninth century, as we know from the Neapolitan liturgical calendar

carved in marble and dating from that time. The date of the feast on the Naples calendar is December 9, the same date as that given in the Menology published by order of the Emperor Basil II in 984.⁶⁴

2. Object of the Feast in the East

This feast of the Conception of St. Anne, celebrated in the East and at Naples, had a triple object: (1) the announcement of the Conception to Joachim and Anne, by an angel; (2) the miracle of *active* conception in a sterile womb; (3) the *passive* conception, i.e. the coming into existence of the future mother of God.

The first element determined the introduction of the feast into the liturgical cycle, (after the model of the annunciation of the birth of St. John the Baptist, as recounted in St. Luke—celebrated on September 23). But the two other elements were spontaneously united with the first, and it was the third element that drew the attention of both poets and preachers. These spoke of a special intervention of the Blessed Trinity to prepare the earthly temple of the Word made Flesh. The feast furnished occasion to preachers and sacred poets to manifest their faith in the perpetual sanctity of the *Panagia*, the All-Holy. Their expressions declare a belief in the preservation of the Blessed Virgin from every stain of sin from the first moment of her existence, a belief which was already proposed and accepted long before the feast, and which became more and more explicitly recognized and professed. Thus the feast of the Conception of Our Lady (in the sense of her Immaculate Conception) appeared in the East and developed, not in the midst of theological controversy, as in the West, but as the natural flowering in its own appropriate time of a deep Marian piety.⁶⁵

3. Immaculate Conception in Oriental Tradition.

As Pere Jugie has magnificently shown, Our Lady's Immaculate Conception is abundantly witnessed to in the Oriental tradition down to the 16th century. Before the Council of Ephesus, it is true, we find some of the Greek Fathers—misled by an erroneous exegesis of Origen upon the words of Simeon to Mary: "Thy own soul a sword shall pierce,"⁶⁶ attributing imperfections and even positive faults to Our Lady. Two Eastern Fathers of the fourth century who remained uninfluenced by Origen's erroneous exegesis were St. Ephrem the Syrian and St. Epiphanius, both outstanding defenders of Mary's Spotless sanctity. After the Council of Ephesus, and especially after the institution of the feasts of Mary's Nativity and Conception, there is an increasing chorus of defenders of Our Lady's perpetual holiness. There were St. Proclus and St. Theodotus of Ancyra in the fifth century, St. Sophronius of Jerusalem in the sixth and seventh century, St. Andrew of Crete, St. John of Damascus, St. Germanus of Constantinople, Bishop John of Euboea in the eighth century, and many more in the ninth and succeeding centuries down to the sixteenth.⁶⁷ If some theologians among the dissident Orientals today deny the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, it is partly because of an unfortunate polemical spirit (especially since the solemn definition by the Pope in 1854), but partly also because contact has been lost among the dissident Orientals with much of their own tradition, since the fall of Constantinople in 1453.⁶⁸ The labor of Pere Jugie and others in editing and publishing the works of early Byzantine theologians is helping to bring to light the Eastern tradition in its completeness.

4. Western Beginnings of Feast of Immaculate Conception

While this development was going on in the East, belief in the Immaculate Conception found a new liturgical expres-

sion in the West. The celebration of the feast in the West occasioned a great theological controversy, out of which the doctrine was destined to emerge more clearly understood than ever. To this Western development we now turn our attention.

We have seen that the feast of the conception of St. Anne was celebrated at Naples in the ninth century. At that time Naples and Southern Italy were part of the Byzantine world. But even earlier than the ninth century in the West there is evidence of a feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin. This evidence is found in Ireland, in the martyrology of the monastery of Tallaght, near Dublin. In this liturgical book, dating back to the latter part of the eighth century, we read the entry under May 3rd: *Maria virginis conceptio*. In the succeeding century the Irish monk, Oengus, described the feasts of the year in a metrical composition. On May 3rd he writes: "The great feast of the Virgin Mary."⁶⁹

There is, however, no proof that this Irish festival was a liturgical celebration; but it probably prepared the way for the liturgical celebration observed in England in the eleventh century. Liturgical calendars of this period, of three different monasteries in England (two at Winchester, one at Worcester), and three other liturgical books (a missal and a pontifical of Exeter, and a benedictional of Canterbury), show the English feast celebrated on December 8th.⁷⁰

5. The Theological Controversy

Despite the opposition of the Norman bishops the observance of the feast spread through England and across the channel to Normandy and France. Its adoption at the cathedral church at Lyons in 1140 occasioned a protest by St. Bernard. This was the beginning of the great theological controversy in the medieval schools in which many of the greatest theologians of the time either expressed doubt or denied that Mary

was conceived immaculate, their difficulty being the reconciliation of this privilege of Our Lady with the universality of Christ's Redemption.⁷¹

The Immaculate Conception, however, had its defenders among the theologians. The earliest theologian to write a well-considered theological treatise defending this unique privilege of Mary was the monk Eadmer, disciple and biographer of St. Anselm of Canterbury. Father Herbert Thurston discovered an original manuscript of this work at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, early in the present century. The inscription at the beginning reads: "*De Conceptione Sanctae Mariae editum ab Eadmero monacho magno peccatore.*"⁷² The Franciscans were the great champions of the Immaculate Conception in the thirteenth century. In 1263 the doctrine was adopted by the whole Order of Friars Minor.⁷³ It was the teaching of the great Franciscan doctor, John Duns Scotus, that was most influential in removing the difficulties in the minds of many theologians. Scotus showed that the dignity of Christ as Redeemer was enhanced and not prejudiced by the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, since according to this teaching Our Lord redeemed His Blessed Mother most perfectly, preserving her from original sin rather than cleansing her from its stain.

6. Rome and the Immaculate Conception

Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Roman Church permitted the celebration of the feast of Our Lady's Conception in many places, and finally, in 1476, under the Franciscan Pope Sixtus IV, the feast was officially adopted at Rome. Seven years later, in 1483, the same Pope, calling attention to the fact that the Church at Rome celebrated the feast of Our Lady's Conception, gravely reprobated and condemned preachers who dared to call the doctrine of the Im-

maculate Conception heretical.⁷⁴ In 1546, the fifth session of the Council of Trent solemnly declared that it was not its intention in its decree on the doctrine of original sins to include the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God.⁷⁵

The progress of the doctrine towards its eventual solemn definition continued. The Dominican Pope St. Pius V, in 1570, forbade preachers under pain of suspension to speak against this privilege of Mary universally accepted by the Catholic faithful.⁷⁶ Pope Paul V, in 1616, directed that the doctrine should not be questioned even in the academic discussions of the theological schools.⁷⁷

When a question was proposed concerning the object of the feast of Our Lady's Conception, Pope Alexander VII, calling attention to previous decrees and constitutions of the Roman Pontiffs, declared in 1661 that it celebrated Mary's immunity from original sin in the first moment of the creation of her soul and its infusion into her body.⁷⁸ And in 1708 Pope Clement XI made the feast of Our Lady's Conception a holy day of obligation for the whole Western Church.⁷⁹

7. Witness of Art to the Immaculate Conception

The universal acceptance of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception on the part of the faithful is reflected in the religious art of the post-Tridentine period. Emile Male, the French art-historian, describes a fresco by Il Domenichino in the chapel of St. Januarius in Naples, which illustrates the manner in which post-Tridentine art exalts the Blessed Virgin. In this fresco a young hero is represented as treading underfoot the religious innovators of the sixteenth century. He carries a white banner on which is written *Semper Virgo—Dei Genetrix—Immaculata*. Near the hero (who is obviously Faith) a young woman, Prayer, carries the Rosary. The *Ave Maria* mounts up to the Blessed Mother who kneels in

heaven before her Divine Son and offers to Him the prayers of mankind. At this intercession two angels are seen returning to the scabbard the sword of God's anger.⁸⁰

The Immaculate Conception, proclaimed on the banner of the Naples fresco, is portrayed with profound feeling and great splendor by the painters and sculptors of the period. Male cites two outstanding examples from Spain: the polychrome sculptor Montanes and the famous painter, Murillo.⁸¹

8. Solemn Definition of Immaculate Conception

Countering the development of rationalism, materialism, unbelief, social and political upheaval in the modern centuries, the devotion of the Catholic world to Mary Immaculate continued to increase during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and finally in 1854, when the cult of the Immaculate Virgin had grown beyond estimation among the Catholic faithful, and when the bishops throughout the world had petitioned the Holy See for a solemn definition, Pope Pius IX proclaimed as a dogma of faith, divinely revealed, that the Blessed Virgin Mary in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God in view of the merits of Christ Jesus, the Savior of the human race, was preserved immune from every stain of original sin.⁸²

Four years later the apparitions of the Blessed Mother to little Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes, and the title Our Lady chose to identify herself ("I am the Immaculate Conception"), were a confirmation from heaven of the declaration of the Solemn Magisterium of the Church.

These events served to accelerate the veneration of Our Lady under the title of the Immaculate. Five years before the definition of 1854 the Blessed Mother under the title of the Immaculate Conception was declared patroness of the

United States at the first Council of Baltimore. Since 1854 many dioceses and hundreds of churches and other religious institutions throughout the world have been dedicated in honor of Our Lady under this title.

9. Dedication of May and October

The custom of dedicating the month of May to the Blessed Virgin, a custom which had begun in Italy in the 18th century, spread in the 19th century into Belgium, Switzerland, Austria-Hungary, and later on to the whole Catholic world. Towards the end of the century the series of Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII on the Rosary, and the elevation of the feast of the Holy Rosary to a double of the second class, soon brought out about the dedication of October also as the month of the Rosary to Mary.⁸⁸

10. Newest Marian Feasts

Other new universal feasts of Our Lady were instituted, among them the feast commemorating her apparitions at Lourdes (Feb. 11). The twentieth century saw the extension to the universal Church of the Feast of the Divine Maternity of Mary (October 11). This was ordered by Pope Pius XI in commemoration of the fifteenth centenary of the Council of Ephesus. And, most recently, our Holy Father Pope Pius XII, in the midst of the war's upheavals, first consecrated the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1942, and then two years later, in 1944, extended to the universal Church the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to be celebrated as a double of the second class on the octave day of the Assumption.

But to attempt even to summarize the whole development of Marian devotion in the past century—the century of the Immaculate Conception—would require many pages. To note

some of the outstanding features has been our purpose here. There has been, in the century that has elapsed since 1854, a vast and constantly expanding development in every field with respect to Mary: liturgical, devotional, artistic, literary, and—underlying all else, a theological development. Mariology, that part of dogmatic theology which treats of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her relations, with the Blessed Trinity, with her divine Son Jesus Christ, and with the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, has developed to such an extent that whole works are devoted to summarizing and cataloguing the vast literature that deals with the subject, and academies and periodicals have come into being with the sole purpose of publishing the Marian studies, books and articles that continue to appear.⁸⁴

11. Dogma of the Assumption and the Marian Year

Culminating the century of the Immaculate Conception and appearing in the full flowering of this vast Marian development are the two great events of the past four years—the solemn definition of Our Lady's Assumption body and soul into heaven as a dogma of faith divinely revealed, and the setting aside of the whole year from December 8, 1953, to December 8, 1954, as the first Marian year specially dedicated to the Holy Mother of God.

12. Conclusion

This brings to the present day our brief sketch of the history of the place of Our Lady in the liturgy of the Church. It is only a sketch, yet inadequate though it is, it is not merely a collection of items of historical interest: it is rather the story—in bare outline, indeed—of the most intimate life and love of the Mystical Body of Christ. It is the very heart of the Church's Story, for it tells of the manifold expressions of

the Marian devotion of the Church and her members of their love for the "Immaculate Mother of Jesus and Our Mother, Mary." It tells, too, of how Mary's children in the Mystical Body through the centuries come to know more and more clearly and explicitly "the peerless richness of the sublime gifts" with which God had filled their Mother, from the first moment of her conception until the day on which He crowned her Queen of Heaven and earth, after her Assumption into heaven.⁸⁵

It is the story of the ever more glorious fulfillment of prophecy of Our Lady herself: "Behold, henceforth all generations shall call be blessed" (Lk. 1,48).

EXPLANATION OF ABBREVIATIONS IN REFERENCES

- CE—*Catholic Encyclopedia*, in 15 vol. (ed. by C. G. Hebermann et al.), New York Robert Appleton Co., 1907-1912.
- DACL—*Dictionnaire D'Archeologie Chretienne et De Liturgie*, publie par Le Rme dom Fernand Cabrol et dom Henri Leclerg.—Paris, Librairie Letouzey et Ane, 1932.
- DB—*Echiridion Symbolorum*, H. Denzinger—C. Bannwart, S.J.— J.B. Umberg, S.J.,—Edito 21-23, Friburg; Brigoviae, Herder, 1937.
- DTC—*Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique*, commence sous la direction de A. vancant, E. Mantenot—continus sous celle de E. Aman.—Paris, Librairie Letouzey, et Ane, 1930-1950.
- EC—*Enciclopedia Cattolica*, Ente per L'Enciclopedia Cattolica e per Il Libro Cattolico, Citta del Vaticano, 1952.
- PG—Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*.
- PL—Migne, *Patrologia Latina*.

¹ The term 'Liturgy' is here understood in the boardest sense, i.e. as signifying the public rites and services of the Church, and the topic 'Mary in the Liturgy' is here treated historically. For a doctrinal treatment of the same topic, taken in the strictest sense, i.e. as signifying the Eucharistic Sacrifice, see C. Howell, S.J., *The Blessed Virgin in the Liturgy*, Marian Reprint No. 17, The Marian Library, U. of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio.

The writer wishes to asknowledge his indebtedness to Most Rev. Sebastian Weber, O.F.M., Conv., for invaluable bibliographical assistance in the preparation of the present paper.

² Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, cap. 19 P.L. I, 1222.—Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 8,22 P.G. XI, 1550.—cited by J. J. Guiniven, C.S.S.R., *The Precept of Hearing Mass*, C.U.A. Canon Law Studies, No. 158, Washington, D.C. 1942.—p. 41.

³ Cf. H. Thurston, S.J., *The Lives of the Saints (Butler's Lives)*, vol. I, January 6th, p. 88.—New York, P. J. Kenedy and Sons. vol. XII, December 25th, p. 239, and H. Thurston—D. Attwater, *ibid.*

⁴ *Constitutiones Apostolorum*, VIII, 33.—Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, I, 539-541.—cited in Guiniven, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁵ Cf. S. Indelicato, Art. *Martirio e Martire*, in EC, vol. VIII, 236 ff. Culto dei M. e Iconografia Antica.

⁶ Cf. F. Antonelli, O.F.M., Art. *Marai*, in EC, vol. VIII, Origine e primo sviluppo del culto liturgico di Maria in Oriente e Occidente, p. 93.

⁷ Cf. C. Howell, *loc. cit.*, pp. 5-7.

⁸ F. Antonelli, *art. cit.*

⁹ Cf. O. Marucchi, *Manual of Christian Archeology*, transl. and adapted by H. Vecchierello, O.F.M., St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, N.J., 1935.—p. 178 ff.

¹⁰ For a description, see I. Schuster, *The Sacramentary* (transl. from the Italian by A. Levelis-Marke and Mrs. W. Fairfax-Cholmeley) 5 vol., col. V. p. 2.—Benziger, New York, 1930.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 3.

¹² Cf. Schuster, *op. cit.* pp. 4-5; F. Antonelli, *art. cit.* p. 94.

¹³ Schuster, *op. cit.* pp. 22-30.

¹⁴ For a description of the technique and an example of such a gold glass medallion see *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Miniatures*, Album L. Distributor: Book-of-the-Month Club, New York, 1950—Plate 1.

¹⁵ Cf. F. Antonelli, *loc. cit.*—p. 94.

¹⁶ *The Raccolta*, (Edited and translated by J. Christopher and C. Spence), Benziger Bros., New York, 1943, No. 1943, No. 302, p. 221.

¹⁷ Cf. G. Roschini, Art. *Maria*, in EC, Vol. VIII—Il culto Mariano, pp. 90-91; also, C. Cechelli, *Mater Christi*, 3 vol. Roma, 1946.—La piu Antica Preghiera alla Madonna: Il Sub tuum praesidium, vol. 1, Appendix IX, pp. 305-308.

¹⁸ Cf. C. Cechelli, *loc. cit.*, p. 307, where the author quotes from Msgr. P. Hindo, *Disciplina Antiochena Antica-Siri*, IV, p. 307, the Latin translation of the prayer rendered into English above. The Latin version runs: Protege nos, Mater Dei, sub alas tuas ab omnibus periculis: Tu es refugium nostrum, spes nostra maxima, nobis nocentes propter peccata nostra, frange et ad nihilum redige. Ab portum salutis, quae es tu ipsa, duc nos, O Beatissima!

¹⁹ Cf. F. Antonelli, *loc. cit.* p. 94.

²⁰ M. Jugie, A. A., *L'Immaculee Conception Dans L'Ecriture Sainte*

Et Dans La Tradition Orientale, Romae, 1952—Academia Marianna-Bibliotheca Immaculae Conceptionis—No. 3... pp. 75-76.

²¹ Cf. C. Cecchelli, *Mater Christi*, Vol. I, pp. 169-171.

²² Cf. C. Gumbinger, O.F.M. Cap., "The Cult of the Mother of God in the Byzantine Liturgy," in *Franciscan Studies*, Sept. 1941, vol. 22 (New Series vol. 1), no. 3—pp. 49-61, for a description of the prayers in honor of Mary in the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. After describing the setting and quoting the text of the prayers, the writer sums up: "Thus from beginning to end the Byzantine liturgy calls upon the Mother of God in sweet and gracious accents, remembering her fulness of grace, her perpetual virginity and power with God, as well as her greatest glory, the Divine Maternity."—p. 59.

²³ Cf. E. Campana, *Maria Nel Culto Cattolico*, 2 Vol., Marietti, Torino, 1943 (Ed. G. Roschini, O.S.M.), vol. I, p. 310. The author cites an article written by Baumstark in *Römische Quartalschrift* in 1897, establishing the existence of such feast of Our Lady.

²⁴ Cf. E. Campana, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 247, pp. 250-251.—For the dating of the *Peregrinatio Silviae*, see P. de Labriolle, *Latin Christianity*, London, 1924, p. 380.

²⁵ "Virginalis solemnitas linguam nostram hodie, fratres, ad laudis praeconium provocat."—(P.G.65-682)—quoted in F. Antonelli, *art. cit.*—p. 95.

²⁶ Cf. F. Cayre, A.A., *Manual of Patrology*, 2 vol.—transl. into English by H. Howitt, A.A.—Society of St. John the Evangelist, Desclee, Paris, 1936-1940—vol. 1, pp. 447-460; vol. 2, pp. 15-19.

²⁷ Cf. F. Cabrol, O.S.B., *Art. Marie, Mere de Dieu, Culte Liturgique*, in *DACL*, Tome dixieme Deuxieme Partie, vol. xxiv. pp. 2035-2043.

²⁸ *Conc. Eph.* Act. V, c. ii. (Mansi, iv. 1332 c),—quoted in B. J. Kidd, *A History of The Church to A.D. 461*, 3 vol., Oxford, 1922.—vol. 3, p. 241.—see also C. Cecchelli, *op. cit.* vol. 1, pp. 243-244.

²⁹ C. Cecchelli, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 243-273.

³⁰ Cf. F. Antonelli, *op. cit.* p. 96.

³¹ Cf. F. Cabrol, *art. cit.*

³² Cf. E. Campana, *op. cit.* Vol. 1. p. 311.

³³ Cf. E. Campana, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 301-304.

³⁴ F. Cabrol, *art. cit.*

³⁵ Cf. Schuster, *op. cit.*, Vol. V., p. 31.

³⁶ *Loc. cit.*

³⁷ Cecchelli, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 371.

³⁸ *Loc. cit.* p. 97.

³⁹ B. Capelle, *l'Assunzione e la Liturgia*, Roma, 1953—p. 20.

⁴⁰ Cf. E. Campana, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 313.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See Campana *op. cit.* Vol. I, pp. 190-191; also H. Thurston, S.J.,

and D. Attwater, *Bulter's Lives of the Saints*, Vol. IX, September. London 1934. pp. 83-84.

⁴³ Campana—*op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 225-228.

⁴⁴ Campana—*op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 314—Schuster gives a detailed account of the ceremonies of the Feast of the Assumption in the ancient Roman Liturgy, in *The Sacramentary* Vol. V, Part. 8—ch. iii, pp. 31 ff.

⁴⁵ Campana—*op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 315.

⁴⁶ St. Bonaventure, *Com. in III Sent.*, D. 9, a. 1, 9.3.

⁴⁷ St. Thomas, *Sum Theol.* II-IIae, 9.103, a.4, ad 2um.

⁴⁸ F. Antonelli, *art. cit.*

⁴⁹ G. Goyau—article LePuy, in C. E.

⁵⁰ Jos. Clayton—article *Walsingham Priory*, in C.E.

⁵¹ Emile Male, *Religious Art From the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century*, *Pantheon*, New York, 1949—p. 132.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 133.

⁵³ H. T. Henry, *Art. Magnificat*, in C.E.

⁵⁴ F. Cabrol, *Mass of the Western Rites*, St. Louis, 1934,—p. 177.

⁵⁵ E. Campana *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 394-395.

⁵⁶ Beata vero Maria, postquam Dominus eius Filius sepultus fuit, a monumento, ut quidam dicunt, numquam discessit, sed continue ibidem lacrymans vigilavit, donec resurgentem prima videre meruit, et ideo in eius honore a difelibus sabbatum celebratur. S. Antonii Pat. *Thaumaturgi Incliti Sermones Dominicales et in Solemnitatibus* ... Antonius Maria Locatelli edidit—Patavii, 1895 sqq.—Sermo in Pascha Domini—p. 125-a.

⁵⁷ F. Antonelli, *art. cit.*

⁵⁸ Cf. F. Antonelli—*art. cit.*; also H. Thurston and D. Attwater—*Bulter's Lives of the Saints*—Vol. X—October 7, p. 83-84.

⁵⁹ Cf. P. Batiffol, *History of the Roman Breviary*, (transl. from the French by A. Baylay), New York, 1912—Appendix, p. 333, cf. A. S. Foley, S.J., *St. Regis, A Social Crusader*, Bruce, Milwaukee, 1941.—pp. 4-5.

⁶⁰ H. T. Henry—article *Salve Regina* in C.E.—also P. Batiffol, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-172.

⁶¹ PG 98, 1305-1316—quoted in M. Jugie, A.A., *L'Immaculee Conception Dans L'Ecriture Sainte et Dans La Tradition Orientale*, pp. 135-136; cf. also F. Cayre, A.A., *Manual of Patrology*, Vol. II, pp. 292-293.

⁶² PG 96, 1473—quoted in Jugie, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

⁶³ Jugie, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-138.—Jugie notes also the mention of the feast in the *Typicon* of St. Sabbas, which dates from the century; but he comments: "Le *Typicon* ne prouvera rien, tant qu'on n'aura pas trouve l'edition contemporaine de Saint Sabbas; car il est sur que dans l'etat ou il nous est parvenu, il a subi des fortes retouches."—p. 317.

⁶⁴ PG 117 A. 196.—cited in Jugie *op. cit.*, p. 137.—for the calendar of Naples, see Jugie, *loc. cit.*, and A. Cecchin, O.S.M., *L'Immacolata*

Nella Liturgia Occidentale Anteriore Al Secolo XIII, edit. Marianum, Roma, 1943,—15 ff.

⁶⁵ Cf. Jugie, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁶⁶ LK. 2, 25—Origen said that the sword was a positive doubt in Mary's mind as she stood at the foot of the Cross, about the divinity of Jesus. The best reason Origen could find for this was that Mary had to have at least one sin so that she might be redeemed.—see Jugie, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

⁶⁷ The Roman Breviary employs a sermon of St. Germanus of Constantinople in the lessons of the third nocturn for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception—and a sermon of St. Sophronius of Jerusalem in the third nocturn lessons of the 9th of December on the second day of the octave.—These are translated by C. Gumbinger, *art. cit. supra*, pp. 51-52.

⁶⁸ Cf. Jugie, *op. cit.*, p. 311-316; 473-477.

⁶⁹ Cf. H. Thurston-D. Attwater, *Butler's Lives etc.*, Dec. 8, p. 109; also A. Cecchin, *op. cit.*, pp. 15 ff., where the texts are given in Latin and English.

⁷⁰ H. Thurston-D. Attwater, *op. cit.* p. 106; A. Cecchin, *op. cit.* pp. 23-26, where the texts are given in Latin.

⁷¹ H. Thurston-D. Attwater, *loc. cit.*

⁷² Cf. X le Bachelet, *Art. Immaculee Conception*, in DTC, Vol. VIII—part. 1,—p. 1007; The work of Eadmer is in Migne, PL, t. CLIX, pp. 301-308.

⁷³ H. Thurston-D. Attwater, *loc. cit.*, p. 107.

⁷⁴ DB—735

⁷⁵ DB—792.

⁷⁶ M. Jugie, *L'Immaculee Conception etc.*, p. 313.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ DB—1100.

⁷⁹ H. Thurston-D. Attwater, *Butler's Lives etc.*, Dec. 8th, p. 107. It was Pope Clement XI who also made the feast of the Holy Rosary a universal feast, as a memorial of a victory over the Turks in 1716 (at Pietrovaradino).—cf. F. Antonelli, *art. Maria* in EC, p. 102.

⁸⁰ Cf. E. Male—*op. cit.* p. 169.

⁸¹ Male, *op. cit.*—p. 169-170, Plates Nos. 37 and 38.

⁸² DB—1641.

⁸³ F. Antonelli—*art. cit.* p. 101.

⁸⁴ Mariological societies have appeared in several countries. In our own country the Mariological Society of America publishes a report of papers read at its meeting, under the title of *Marian Studies* (edited by Fr. Juniper Carol, O.F.M., Holy Cross Monastery, Bronx 72, New York)."

⁸⁵ 1954, Marian Year Prayer by Pope Pius XII.

OUTLINE

- I. From the Apostles to Ephesus.
 1. Development of the church calendar.
 2. Evidence from the catacombs and early prayers of devotion to Mary.
 3. Hymns and early feasts honoring Mary.
- II. The post-Ephesine development.
 1. Early churches and images in Mary's honor.
 2. Feast of the Dormition or Assumption.
- III. The medieval flowering.
 1. Shrines in Mary's honor.
 2. Mary in the divine office.
 3. The Rosary, Salve, and the Angelus.
 4. New Marian feasts.
- IV. Modern devotion to Mary.
 1. Eastern origins of the feast of the Immaculate Conception.
 2. Western beginnings of the feast.
 3. Devotion to the Immaculate Conception in modern times.
 4. Newest Marian feast.

Discussion Questions

1. Why were there no feasts of the Blessed Virgin in the early church?
2. What were the earliest general and particular feasts of Mary?
3. What lay devotions to Mary originated in the middle ages?
4. Discuss the parallel between the development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the development of the feast of the same name.



MARY IN THE MODERN WORLD

8

BY

REV. PASCHAL BOLAND, O.S.B.

I. APPARITIONS: PARIS TO BEAURAING

IN this series of Marian Year lectures Mary's place in the world and her role in the salvation of mankind has been clearly demonstrated. The first lecture pointed out Mary's place as seen in Holy Scripture and Tradition. This was followed by other lectures stating and explaining her perpetual virginity, her divine maternity, her fullness of grace, her immaculate conception, her assumption into heaven and her mediation of all graces.

We presume all the facts and background of these lectures when we speak about Mary and our modern world. However, we will summarize some of this a little. The part that Mary holds in the life of every Christian rests upon the fact of her intimate relationship to Jesus, that is, upon the dogma of her Divine Motherhood. Her importance and dignity among men and her office as the Mother of men flows from this doctrine.

At the moment of the Incarnation Mary became the Mother of Jesus, Mother of the God-man, Mother of God. It is evident from Scripture that the angel sent by God to Mary invited her to become the mother of the Savior, of the expected Messiah, the Eternal King of regenerated mankind.

The Fathers of the Church (St. Irenaeus and others) taught that Mary as the Mother of the Redeemer being thus associated in the work of the redemption, has a part similar in our spiritual restoration as that of Eve in our spiritual ruin.

At that same moment of the Incarnation, Mary likewise became the Mother of men. Christ is the head of regenerated mankind, the head of the mystical body whose members we are. As such did Mary conceive Him; and also His members, those who form part of Him, those who have been born again and called to incorporation in Him. When Mary became the Mother of Christ according to the flesh, she became the Mother of men according to the spirit. The scene on Calvary when Christ gives us Mary as our mother in the person of St. John only confirms this truth.

Is it any wonder, then, that the Mother of all men should reveal herself to men from time to time, to console, to comfort, to warn us? What mother is not concerned about her children? What mother does not do all that she can for the welfare of her children? The heart of a mother always loves her children, nor can she ever forget them no matter how they treat her or how wicked they become.

This is the reason for Mary's numerous visits to earth in recent times. She is our Mother and she is greatly concerned about us. Both as the Mother of Christ Whom she loves and Who gave His life for us, and as the Mother of men we are closely bound to her and she to us.

This maternal love of her Immaculate Heart has brought

her to earth at least nine times in the space of about one hundred years—from 1830 when she appeared to a novice of the Sisters of Charity in their chapel in the heart of Paris until 1933 when she appeared to Mariette Beco at Banneux in Belgium.

It would take too long to go into detail about each of these nine apparitions; all of which have been approved as authentic by the Church after very careful investigations.

Since 1931 alone the Church has investigated and rejected fourteen alleged apparitions of our Blessed Mother. Those that were heard of most in America were those that were reported to have taken place in Lipa in the Philippines; also two in Germany, one at Heede and one at Heroldsbach. Necedah, Wisconsin has also been rejected as not authentic. Several apparitions are still being investigated among which are Pfaffenhofen in Germany and Tre Fontane in Rome itself.

1. Miraculous Medal Apparitions in Paris

The first of these officially approved apparitions of Mary is that which took place in the very heart of Paris. The convent of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul is on a busy street with stores and buildings all around it.

Catherine Labouré was a girl from a farm who had long wanted to become a nun. At twenty-three she was able to leave home and follow her vocation. She had great devotion to Our Blessed Mother and when only nine years old had chosen Mary to be her Mother when her own had died. She often prayed to see the Blessed Virgin. On the evening of July 13, 1830 she had again prayed fervently to see Our Lady and was awakened by an angel who told her Our Lady was waiting for her in the chapel. There were five visions. Much of which pertained to France. What pertained to all men was the medal she instructed Catherine to have made

and which we know as the Miraculous Medal. Our Lady promised special graces to those who wear this medal.

2. Apparitions at La Salette

Sixteen years later in 1846 France was again visited by Mary. She appeared to a fifteen-year-old girl, Melanie Calvat, and to Maximin Giraud an eleven-year-old boy who had just met two days before while herding cows. Unlike Catherine Labouré they never prayed to see the Blessed Virgin. In fact, they rarely prayed at all. Neither went to Mass regularly on Sundays and knew so little catechism they had not yet made their First Communion.

Mary appeared to them shortly after noon on September 19, 1846. Her message again was a warning to France to do penance, if not there would be a famine and many children would sicken and die. She told them to spread this message among her people. She especially deplored the violation of Sunday by the people who worked instead of going to Mass, and also the cursing and swearing that was so prevalent.

3. Lourdes: "I am the Immaculate Conception"

We are all familiar with the apparitions of Our Lady at Lourdes in France. Bernadette Soubirous was a fourteen-year-old girl who could neither read nor write, but she was a very good girl and said her rosary over and over again whenever she could each day. She was innocent, obedient and thoroughly good. In five months Our Lady appeared to her nineteen times. Again she asked for penance and prayer. In the ninth apparition Our Lady revealed the hidden spring of healing water which has made Lourdes famous all over the world for the many miracles of healing that still continue to take place. Our Lady revealed herself to Bernadette as the Immaculate Conception.

Like Catherine Labouré, Bernadette's body is still incorrupt and is venerated at Nevers.

4. Pont Main: Our Lady of Hope

Pont Main was a village of devout people with great devotion to the Blessed Mother. It was here on January 17, 1871 that Our Lady visited France again. Six children saw her—three boys and three girls. She told them to pray and also that the war would end, and it did, eleven days later. Our Lady did not speak here but unfolded her message by visions in the sky. Part of the time she held a red crucifix in her hands.

5. Pellevoisin: Scapular of the Sacred Heart

Our Lady appeared to thirty-three-year-old Estelle Faguet who had appealed to Our Lady to cure her. There were fifteen apparitions in all. Here Our Lady said that the lack of respect toward Our Lord in Holy Communion and people who prayed with their minds on other things were the things that grieved her. The Scapular of the Sacred Heart was revealed to Estelle in the ninth apparition. She was miraculously cured and lived to be eighty-three years old.

6. Our Lady of Knock in Ireland

After five visits to France Our Lady visited Ireland in 1879. Knock is a village of a dozen or so houses in County Mayo. There was but one apparition lasting for about two hours and witnessed by fifteen people from five to seventy-five years old. With Our Lady was St. Joseph and St. John the Apostle. No words were spoken. No message given. Many consider this a gracious gesture on the part of Mary to have visited this country which has kept the faith so well and suffered so much for it.

Next in the sequence of time is Our Lady's visit to Fatima, but since I want to spend more time on the subject of Fatima we will go on to the next apparition, and take Fatima last.

7. Beauraing: Our Lady of the Golden Heart

Belgium is the scene of the next two apparitions. The first took place at Beauraing, a town of 3,000 people, where Our Lady appeared to five children, four girls and one boy. The oldest was fifteen and the youngest nine years old. The first apparition took place on the evening of November 29, 1932 and the last on January 3, 1933, thirty-three in all. She told them to be good and to pray often. Toward the last of the visions she showed them her heart as of gold and surrounded with rays of light. All of these children are living today and leading devout lives. Most of them are married and have children.

8. Banneux: The Virgin of the Poor

In the evening of January 15, 1933 Our Lady appeared to eleven-year-old Mariette Beco in her backyard at Banneux in Belgium, a village of about 300 people. In a series of eight visions Our Lady told her she was "The Virgin of the Poor." She led her to a stream not far away and said it was reserved and that it was for all people and to ease the sick. She was also told to pray a great deal. She also is alive today and married.

9. Miracles: At all these shrines.

Besides the searching investigations and final approval of these apparitions of Mary in our own times, at each place there is today a shrine well-frequented, where Our Lady herself continues to show her favor by many extraordinary spiritual favors as well as by miraculous cures.

II. FATIMA: THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

Like Lourdes, the story of what happened at Fatima in Portugal in 1917 is well known. Of all these nine apparitions of Our Lady surely the ones at Fatima are for the whole world. France, the eldest daughter of the Church has been giving bad example to the rest of the world for many years. In the appearances of Our Lady at Paris to Catherine Laboure she foretold the downfall of France and of the king, of the murder of the Archbishop of Paris, that the streets would run red with blood as it did in the days of the commune that followed. La Salette and Lourdes sounded her message of "Pray and do penance!" Pont Main showed her holding a red crucifix in her hands as she urged them to pray. At Pellevoisin she asked that her Son be better received in Holy Communion and that so-called devout people must not be thinking of other things when they prayed.

At Fatima Our Lady did not say that *one* country would be punished, but the *whole world*. That is why the apparitions and the messages of Fatima are of such importance for they are of universal significance. She said that Russia would spread its errors over the whole world and that nations would be destroyed, that the Holy Father would suffer much, and that many would endure persecution and martyrdom unless her requests were granted. All has been fulfilled as she foretold—just as her prophecies at Paris and La Salette were fulfilled for France, so Communism has spread over the world, destroying nations, causing the Holy Father to suffer much as he sees the Church strangled and cardinals, bishops, priests and many of the faithful imprisoned and killed in countries where the faith has been for centuries.

Fatima is more than a series of apparitions of Mary to

three shepherd children of Portugal. Already the effects of these apparitions have been felt throughout the world. The Holy Father has consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and has instructed bishops to consecrate their dioceses, priests their parishes, families their homes, and individuals themselves to her (*Auspicia Quaedam*, May 1, 1948).

The observance of the First Saturday of each month as days of Confession, Holy Communion, the Rosary, and meditation is widespread. Churches and chapels all over the world are being dedicated to the Immaculate Heart. In Nagasaki where the first atom bomb fell the new church erected there has been dedicated so, as well as the new church at Los Alamos where the atom bomb was tested.

Replicas of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima, appropriately called "Pilgrim Virgin" statues, have passed through Europe, Africa and distant parts of the world. The great reception accorded the Pilgrim Virgin in America still continues. Millions of Americans have participated in paying homage to Our Lady of Fatima.

In many countries all the archbishops and bishops have gathered together and in magnificent ceremonies consecrated their countries to the Immaculate Heart. Portugal was the first. Spain, France, Ireland, Belgium, Australia, Canada are among those countries so consecrated. Although the United States has not been so consecrated I feel that if enough priests and people would petition the bishops that it would be done. We have a national shrine to Our Lady in Washington, D.C. where the archbishops and bishops gather once each year. It could easily be accomplished.

There can be no doubt that there is a strong and fervent devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in our times which

many call the "Age of Mary." Witness the fact that this year is the first year ever dedicated to Mary in the history of the Church. Witness the fact also of two great Marian doctrines being declared dogmas of our Faith—that of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary solemnly defined in 1854 which centennial is observed by the Marian Year; and that of the solemn defining of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin in 1950.

We have the fact also of the devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart. Let us examine this devotion theologically.

First of all we cannot find any definite beginning of this devotion in the early ages of the Church or even in the Council of Ephesus. There is no gradual unfolding of this doctrine with its development of theological implications with each age making its contribution.

Remote references or the first signs of devotion to the Immaculate Heart are found in commentaries of the Fathers of the Church on the Canticle of Canticles when they apply certain figures or passages to Mary. Prior to the 12th century we find no complete or systematic treatment of the Canticle from a purely Mariological point of view. In liturgical texts the Psalms and Sapiential books were applied to Mary also.

In the 17th century St. John Eudes held that St. Luke's text when the Boy Jesus is found in the temple and that Mary "kept all these things carefully in her heart" (St. Luke 2, 51) is the origin and foundation of devotion to the heart of the Mother of God. Also, the other text (2,35) from St. Luke "and thy own soul a sword shall pierce" is understood that the heart of Mary is pierced by a sword according to Simeon's prophecy.

Although the Fathers of the Church and other ecclesiastical writers make innumerable allusions to the Blessed Virgin none

actually wrote a complete work on her. As we advance through the centuries ascetical writers and theologians associate more and more the perfections of Mary with her Immaculate Heart. St. Bernard is perhaps the first in whom we see real evidence of particular devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Later we find much in St. Bernardine of Siena who has been called the "Doctor of the Immaculate Heart."

Pope Julius II promulgated invocations to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in the first part of the 16th century. But it is not until we come to St. John Eudes that we find a real treatise on this subject (1680). He is *the* Apostle of the Immaculate Heart.

Thus it was not until the 17th century that the devotion became public and received ecclesiastical approval although it was not yet accepted and popularized throughout the universal Church. It was through the efforts of St. John Eudes that liturgical veneration of Mary's Immaculate Heart was realized. His famous work *Le Coeur Admirable*, consists of twelve volumes.

At first bishops in France gave local approval for the feast to be celebrated. Finally, in 1733 Pope Clement XIV gave his approval for the Office and feast. Papal approval for the feast to be celebrated generally was not given until 1805 by Pope Pius VII when he granted it to all who requested it. In the middle of the 19th century Pope Pius IX, when the feast was being celebrated more popularly, gave it its own Office and Mass. Finally, in 1944 this feast was extended to the whole world by Pope Pius XII in order that the memory of his special solemn consecration of December 8, 1942 of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary might be forever preserved. He set August 22, Octave day of the Assumption, as the date to celebrate it and gave it a new Office and Mass.

These acts of Pope Pius XII have given greater impetus to the devotion to the Immaculate Heart.

1. Our Love for the Immaculate Heart

The fundamental reason for our love and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary should parallel our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which stems from the redemptive love of Christ for all mankind. Some theologians hold that Mary's love for man arises from her role as Mediatrix rather than that of Coredemptrix. But in recent times the various factors that have contributed to the spread of this devotion emphasize Mary's maternal love for man. Thus it is more proper to say we honor the coredemptive love of Mary in our devotion to her Immaculate Heart.

As the heart is a universal symbol for love, also that when we speak of the heart of a person we mean and include the whole person, so our devotion to the Immaculate Heart is devotion to the Blessed Virgin herself.

The purpose of devotion to the Immaculate Heart is to unite men to God through Mary's Heart and this is accomplished primarily through two acts that are part of this devotion: the act of consecration and the act of reparation.

2. Act of Consecration

What is the meaning of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary?

The word consecration means to make or declare sacred, to set apart or devote to the service of God, to dedicate.

In this case of consecration to the Immaculate Heart, the act is ultimately referred to God Himself; for one is consecrated to Mary only because she is God's Mother, and a link or stepping-stone to God Himself.

Furthermore, since consecration of oneself is a total gift of

self, such an act can only be referred ultimately to God for He alone has the right of complete ownership of our body and soul.

Pope Pius XII in consecrating the whole world to the Immaculate Heart does this as the Vicar of Him Who purchased all men by the shedding of His Blood. Thus this consecration includes not only Catholics but all men. Powerful and efficacious as this consecration is, it becomes more so when the individual actually participates in the consecration. This is why a diocese, a parish, a family should make this act together with all individuals participating.

The act of consecration is an act of religion by which we offer ourselves to God and become thereby, as it were, sacred to Him by reason of the sanctity which necessarily flows from such an act (St. Thomas Aquinas).

The theological foundation for the act is the dominion or universal sovereignty of Christ and His Mother based on His Kingship and her Queenship.

Consecration as an habitual state is better than a single act or even a series of them. This consecration gives the world totally and perpetually to Mary's Heart. It is the greatest possible tribute to her, and the greatest of Marian devotions.

3. Act of Reparation

What is the meaning of reparation? It means making amends, or expiation of wrongs or injuries done.

Theologically, God might have gratuitously condoned men's offenses, but He did not. He demands satisfaction and atonement for these injuries that have been adequately made through the sufferings, passion and death of Christ. But in the life of a true Christian, reparation becomes a natural act prompted by faith and reason. Reparation goes back to the fall of

Adam and Eve. It continues through the ages. A classic example from the Old Testament is that of King David. The Christian idea of reparation is associated with Christ and His sacrifice on Calvary for us.

Reparation to Mary is rooted in her union with Christ and begins with Calvary where she stood beneath the Cross. Christ and Mary are inseparable, and every outrage committed against Christ is necessarily an outrage to His Mother and it is proper that reparation be made to her also.

Individual benefits from the act of reparation accrue from many partial and plenary indulgences attached to the making of these acts in their various formulas. Also, these acts bring joy to the Heart of Mary and will in turn be blessed by her.

Social benefits follow, for every individual who makes reparation benefits society as a whole. Also, many make reparation for others besides themselves.

We have but briefly outlined the theological approach to devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We see that it rests on a solid theological background. Fatima has brought this devotion to the fore.

4. Fatima and the Immaculate Heart

In 1916 the three children of Fatima were favored with three visits from the Guardian Angel of Portugal. In each vision he spoke to them of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary and that they had plans for them.

One of the three secrets given to the children of Fatima was devotion of Mary's Immaculate Heart. It was on July 13, 1917 when Our Lady showed the children a terrifying vision of the devils and the souls in hell that she told them: "You have just seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them God wants to establish throughout the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If people will do what I

say many souls will be saved and there will be peace." She also showed them her Immaculate Heart on this occasion. They were told to keep this a secret. It was not until 1927 that Lucia received permission to tell this secret, then she revealed it to her confessor, her superior, to the Bishop and to Father Joseph Galumba.

Previously to this on December 10, 1925, Our Lady appeared to Lucia and gave her the Promises for those who would practice the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of the Five First Saturdays and told her to make it known. Lucia told her confessor and superior but they did little or nothing about it. A year later on December 15, 1926, Our Lady asked Lucia if she had spread this devotion to her Immaculate Heart. Then in 1927 Our Lady told Lucia to reveal the two secrets of the July 13, 1917, vision—that of seeing hell and that God wanted devotion to her Immaculate Heart to be established in the world.

In 1929 Our Lady appeared to Lucia and asked that Russia be consecrated to her Immaculate Heart by the Pope and all the Bishops of the world in unison. This was brought to the attention of Pope Pius XI, but nothing was done about it.

In 1940 Lucia wrote to the Bishop regretting that the consecration had not been made. She finally wrote a letter herself to the Pope, then Pius XII, who two years later in 1942 consecrated the world to Mary's Immaculate Heart with a special mention of Russia. Then on May 1, 1948 Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical *Auspicia Quaedam* requested that the consecration to the Immaculate Heart be made in every diocese, parish and family. He recalled that he had already consecrated the world in 1942.

On July 7, 1952 Pope Pius XII consecrated the Russian peoples to Mary's Immaculate Heart. Thus little by little

Mary's request is being granted. There still remains the consecration of Russia by the Holy Father in unison with all the bishops of the world.

After reading and studying the various sources and authorities on Fatima, and being deeply impressed with the messages that Our Lady gave the three children at Fatima we should be moved to love the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary more and more.

We might wish that everyone would consecrate themselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary—and the best way to accomplish this is to talk to all your friends about it—then we will probably hasten the day when we will witness the Holy Father with all the bishops of the world in a solemn ceremony of the consecration of Russia.

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MAGAZINES

- Review for Religious*. Vol. XIII, No. 1.

OUTLINE

Introduction: Because Mary is the mother of men she finds cause to reveal herself from time to time to her spiritual children.

- I. Nine apparitions of our Lady in the past hundred years culminate in Fatima and the devotions to Mary's Immaculate Heart.
- II. The theological significance of the doctrine to Mary's Immaculate Heart.
 1. History of the devotion.
 2. Reason for the devotion.
 3. Consecration to the Immaculate Heart.
 4. Reparation to Mary.
 5. Fatima and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Discussion Questions

1. Trace the development of the doctrine of Mary's spiritual motherhood over men from the doctrine of her divine maternity.
2. See if you can find any common theme in the messages conveyed by Mary in her recent authentic apparitions.
3. What is the parallel between devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary?
4. What is the meaning of "consecration" and "reparation" as acts of religion?
5. How can devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary be made the basis of a program of personal sanctity and Christian social action?

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